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BACKGROUND - DISCOVERER

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The concept for using an Earth satellite as a platform for detecting, measuring, and transmitting significant scientific data to ground-based stations was a natural outgrowth of progress here and abroad with research rockets. The need for timely and continuous scientific research utilizing instrumented rockets and Earth satellites after the close of the International Geophysical Year was also emphasized by the first conference on the International Geophysical Year held in the United States. The impetus which motivated the United States Government to support new methods for collecting otherwise unattainable scientific information was man's rapidly increasing ability to view the world as a whole. From these observations will come a vast body of geophysical data which will permit American scientists to observe all the large scale aspects of the Earth: its exterior, the lower and upper atmosphere, gravity and magnetism, and extraterrestrial features.

In January 1958, in order to accelerate the program, it was decided to augment the WS 117L program by making an interim use of the Thor booster for nine (9) flights. This would permit an early achievement of orbital capability. Subsequently, approval was granted for the use of five (5) additional Thor-boosted satellites to conduct biomedical experiments.

As the result of the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) Order No. 17-59, dated 4 September 1958 with three subsequent amendments, the program structure was established to provide for fifteen (15) ARPA funded flights.

ARPA Order No. 48-59, dated 16 December 1958 confirmed previous instructions to identify this program as DISCOVERER: thus, separating this development from the over-all WS 117L program structure. A Discoverer Development Plan, dated 30 January 1959, providing for a fifteen (15) vehicle program was prepared and submitted for ARPA approval.

The 30 January 1959 Discoverer Plan was approved for a Thirteen (13) vehicle program by Amendment No. 2 to ARPA Order 48-59, dated 24 March 1959.

In compliance with USAF message, AFDAT 59353, dated 27 April 1959, a new Discoverer Development Plan, dated 30 April 1959, calling for a twenty-five (25) vehicle program was prepared and submitted to the ARPA for approval. The 25-vehicle program was approved by Amendment No. 4 to ARPA Order 48-59, dated 20 May 1959.

Amendment No. 6 to ARPA Order 48-60, dated 20 July 1959, increased the Discoverer Program from a 25-vehicle series to a 29-vehicle series. This Amendment included instructions to submit a revised Development and Funding Plan to reflect the program increase.

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As the result of Department of Defense programming actions the Discoverer Program was transferred from the ARPA to USAF cognizance on 17 November 1959.

On 21 December 1959, Hq USAF, after receiving guidance from the AFMC, provided instructions to the AFMD to prepare a revised development plan for the full 29-vehicle program reflecting the full cost through FY 60 and FY 61 to complete the program.

Twenty (20) flights remain in the program. Presentation to DDR&E of Air Force approved plans for this program for FY 60 and FY 61 is scheduled for 15 February 1960.

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