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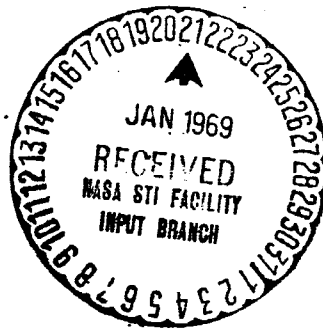
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THE LAUNCHING OF THE ESRO 11/IRIS SATELLITE AS SEEN FROM REDU

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The Launching of the ESRO II/IRIS Satellite as
Seen From Redu
J. Le Peltier

Redu, 16 May 1968

The launching of the ESRO II satellite, which had so often been postponed, was set for the following night at 0206 hours Greenwich time, or 0306 hours local time.

As each person arrived at the site on the morning before, the latest messages forwarded by teleprinter from the network control center at Darmstadt were read in the perhaps vain hope that this time would be the real thing and no last minute annoyance would arise to again cause delay of the operation.

From Darmstadt 0813 hours: Launch time still predicted for 0206 hours the following morning.

Noon came and there was no news. The site equipment stood ready. The personnel charged with the night shift went to get some rest.

The weather remained forbidding. Huge black clouds, pushed on by icy winds blew alternately from east and from west finally piling up over Redu.

Nearing 2200 hours at Redu, in addition to site personnel there were some engineers who had come down from Noordwijk. The atmosphere was very relaxed and conversation turned to the most varied subjects, usually nothing whatever to do with the launch. Someone read a detective story. The latest news:

1506 hours: time - 11 hours. Everything OK; 1606 hours: time - 10 hours; 1706 hours ---- 1806 hours ---- 2206 hours ---- 2306 hours.

Messages stacked up hourly. Everything OK. 2336 hours: The ESTRACK network announced its readiness and gave the green light as far as it was concerned;

0006 hours: time - 2 hours;

0106 hours: time - 1 hour;

0136 hours: time - 30 minutes;

time - 20 minutes ---- time - 15 ---- time - 8 ----

time - 6: Everything OK.

As 0200 hours approached a loudspeaker carried the voice of Mr. Potter relaying from Darmstadt data arriving by telephone from America. The audio level was poor. Conversations which had been sometimes lively, sometimes not, now were stopped. A group formed around the loudspeaker.

time - 1 minute

time - 5 seconds-4-3-2-1-0.

"Lift off" confirmed at 0206 hours. A joker asks what time is forecast for the "fall down".

Operation of the first stage is correct; of the second stage: correct; of the third stage, then of the fourth stage: correct.

The waiting started again and conversations resumed. The odds were calculated and bets were taken.

The crackling of the teleprinter began again at 0253 hours. Johannesburg has received the signals. This time it's success for sure.

0300 hours: Madagascar has received the signals at the time predicted.

The vehicle was supposed to arrive above Redu at about 0320 hours. Every person went to his station and waited. The signal was detected at 0318 hours. Two minutes later, the satellite was well above the horizon emitting strong, steady signals. The remote control guidance instructions are passed as planned; the vehicle reacts immediately.

The day breaks above Redu. The black clouds have disappeared. The sky is blue.

The first measurements made at the site indicate that the satellite was advanced over the predicted schedule by 23 seconds. The calculations made from the first transit are sent to Darmstadt over the teleprinter. Then, during the wait for the second orbit, everyone went to the snackbar for the coffee which would keep him awake.

0454 hours - Second transit - Signal noted - Control guidance sent - Confirmation - Recording - Reports - It has almost become routine.

0635 hours - Third transit. This will be the last one for the morning. Reports are quickly sent. The relief personnel arrive already knowing the news from the radio reports.

The next transit will be in the evening at approximately 1830 hours. The custom is now entrenched. The site will live from now on responding to the rhythm of the satellite from dawn to dusk.