

Sputnik – the Dawn of the Space Race



On October 4, 1957, the Soviet Union sent into orbit Sputnik 1, the first artificial satellite in history. Then, a month later, an even larger and heavier satellite, Sputnik 2, carried the dog Laika into orbit.

Sputnik's launch came as an unnerving surprise to the United States. The space age had dawned and America's Cold War rival suddenly appeared technologically superior.

The first U.S. effort to launch a satellite failed when its Vanguard rocket exploded during lift-off. Finally, on January 31, 1958, a Jupiter-C rocket sent Explorer 1 into orbit. The space race was underway.

It flew at 18,000 miles per hour, 500 miles above the Earth's surface

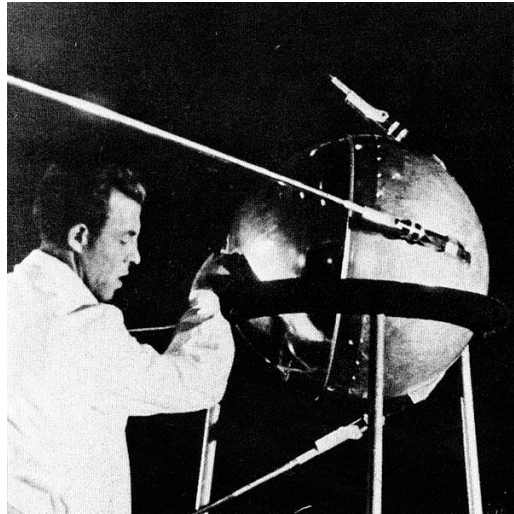


It flew over the United States Seven (7) times a day.

It made a loud, beeping noise as it orbited Earth, which could be easily heard when tracked by electronic sonar. This same noise was aired on Russian radio serving as a victory in the “Space Race”

These signals lasted for 22 days and then the batteries ran out.

Sputnik 1 burned up on January 4th 1958 as it came back into earth’s atmosphere. It orbited the planet for 3 months and travelled over 37 million miles in total



The orbit of Sputnik sent American scientists into a race that was to last throughout the Cold War. Propaganda on both sides was created. The USSR claimed victory. The United States claimed that the Sputnik flight was not a threat to the nation’s security – just to reassure the people – and that America would soon surpass this Soviet achievement.

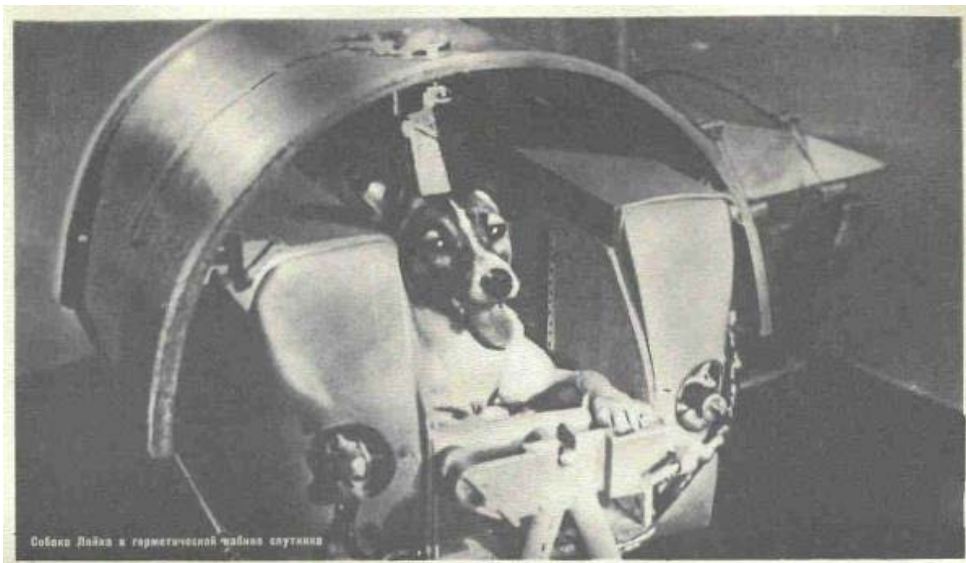
Feeling helpless, Americans gazed up at Sputnik gliding across the twilight sky. "Now the Americans sleep under a Russian moon", boasted leader Nikita Khrushchev.

The first U.S. effort to launch a satellite failed when its Vanguard rocket exploded during lift-off. Finally, on January 31, 1958, a Jupiter-C rocket sent Explorer 1 into orbit. Officially, the space race was now underway.

Sputnik II

Exploiting the Russian lead, he (Nikita Khrushchev) wanted to embarrass America further with his vision of a more magnificent spaceship. Khrushchev ordered his rocket engineers to build Sputnik-2 in just three weeks, and this time, a living being should ride the rocket into orbit. In early November the special order was met as Khrushchev's cobbled together spaceship was ready for blast-off and a small dog named Laika was ready to rocket into history on its fire and thunder. Part of a group of research dogs, she was selected mainly for her calm nature.

Specially trained, Laika was conditioned to vibration, noise, lengthy confinement and restricted movement within small capsules, high G centrifuge runs and airplane rides to familiarize her with the sensations of flight. Being wired with biomedical sensors and wearing space garments became a way of life for Laika. She also learned to eat a food / water mix in jelly form.



After Sputnik II many other ventures were made and attempted by both nations during the Cold War. The greatest accomplishment for the United States will come when, after John F. Kennedy's dream, a man will land on the moon. When the Soviet Union collapsed, America had a strong lead in space exploration. Today, both countries work together on board the International Space Station on various scientific and astrological projects.