

Huntsville, AL 35801

March 15, 1989

Mr. David Bowman  
Reporter and  
Editorial Writer

Dear Mr. Bowman,

With respect to your story about Colonel John Nickerson:

You got it exactly right.

Sincerely,

A Team Member

## A couple of foot notes:

1. On the day the fine was assessed against John, the people of Huntsville raised that \$1200 and delivered it to him before nightfall.

2. With respect to Bruce Medaris' persistent claim over the years that he was in charge of developing the Explorer satellites, the truth is this:

The Explorers had been designed, built and were on the shelf well before Bruce ever arrived in Huntsville.

### I've sent a copy of your story to Art Harris

(Washington Post  
writer who did  
feature on Gen. Medaris  
3/15/89)



Research • Design • Development

November 27, 1990

The Huntsville News  
2317 Memorial Parkway S W  
Huntsville, Alabama 35801

Attention: David Bowman

Dear David,

There has been a great deal of speculation over the launch you describe in your monday article.

Certainly, the ones of us who worked on the "Payload" program speculated that Von Braun intended to orbit Payload RS-27, if, infact, it was possible to achieve earth orbit.

However, when RS-27 was launched, Von Braun was required to use a "Dummy" 4th stage rocket. The trajectory of thet vehicle was perfect. It did set altitude, velocity and distance records. We speculated that with a "Live" 4th stage rocket. it would have achieved earth orbit.

When Sputnik was orbited in 1957, we knew in our hearts that RS-27 could have achieved earth orbit.

In 1958, using the exact same configuration as the RS-27 system, but with a "Live" 4th stage rocket, the United States orbited it's first earth satellite.

The Payload RS-27 program was classified "Secret". We could not discuss the program. If we had discussed it in 1956 or 1957, it would have been considered speculation and we would have been subject to criminal prosecution.

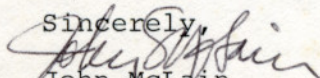
Colonel Nickerson could see that due to blind fate, that one moment of greatness which had been thrust upon him and the ones of us who worked on the program was being snatched away by a misguided Administration. An Administration which had decreed that the Air Force would have the honor of launching the first earth satellite.

Even in the end, our moment of belated greatness was snatched away. The prototypes that we had designed, built and tested were taken to the Jet Propulsion Labs in California. JPL made minor design changes and received full credit for Exployer I.

I remain a firm advocate of our system of government. It is our ploiticians who, from time to time, cause flaws. That particular flaw caused the United States to come in second in the race to orbit an earth satellite.

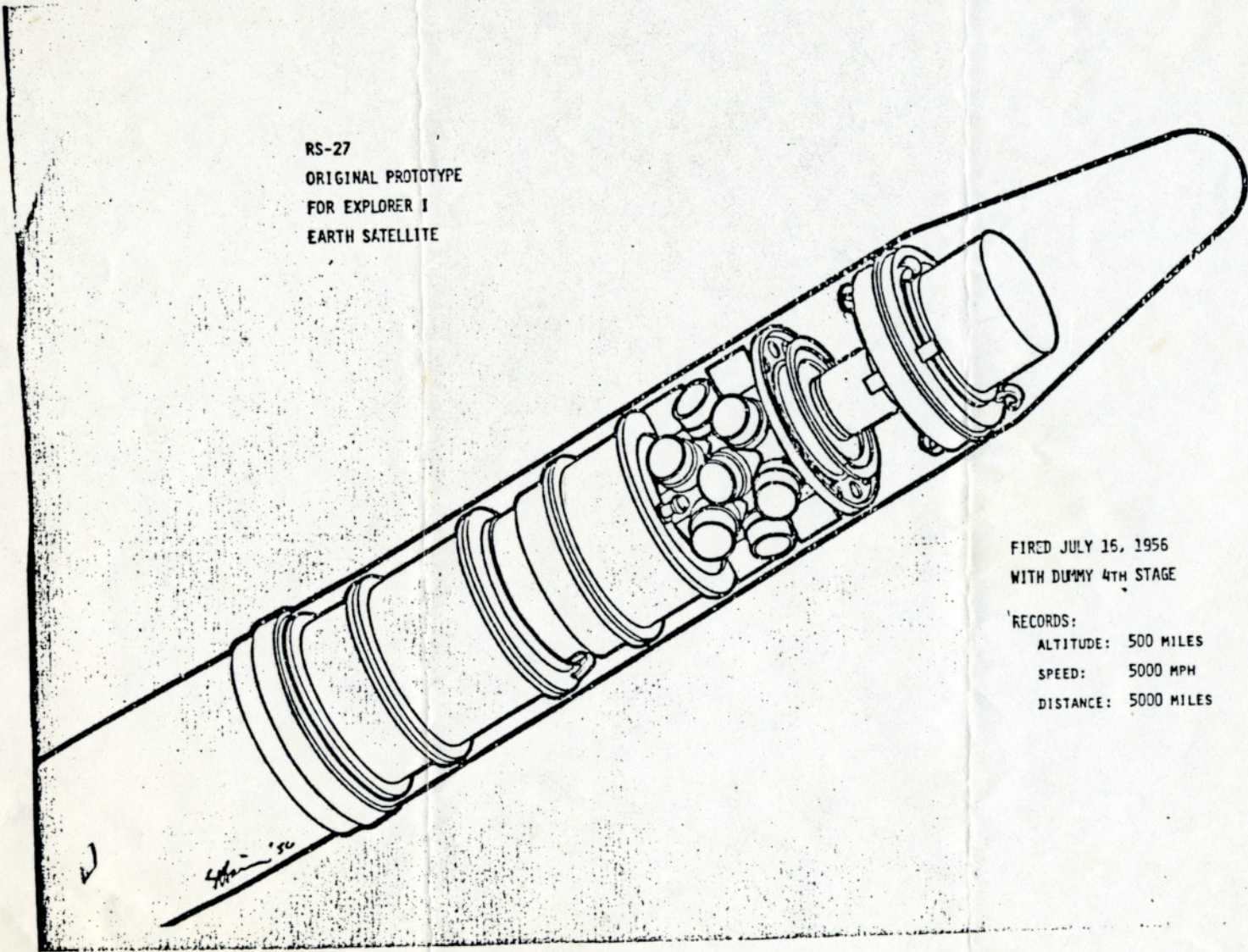
As to General John B. Medaris, if he had had Colonel John C. Nickerson's courage, Payload RS-27 would have been launched with a "Live" 4th stage rocket.

Sincerely,

  
John McLain

Industrial • Commercial • Consumer • Government  
Products • Processes • Procedures

RS-27  
ORIGINAL PROTOTYPE  
FOR EXPLORER I  
EARTH SATELLITE



FIRED JULY 16, 1956  
WITH DUMMY 4TH STAGE

RECORDS:  
ALTITUDE: 500 MILES  
SPEED: 5000 MPH  
DISTANCE: 5000 MILES

# The Huntsville Times

P.O. BOX 1487 - WEST STATION  
HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA 35807  
(205) 532-4000

WILLIAM C. GREEN, JR.  
PUBLISHER

November 30, 1990

TO: David Bowman

FROM: Bill Green

Congratulations on the series of articles on Col. Nickerson. They were very interesting.

I had just moved back to Alabama to begin working for The Birmingham News in 1957, and read, with interest, the events that were taking place, as well as the trial. I didn't have the interest that I have today, however, because of not living in Huntsville. Therefore, all of them were particularly interesting to me.

You did a good job and we appreciate it very much.

*Bill Green*

# Huntsville News

2111 CLINTON AVENUE  
HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA 35805  
(AREA CODE 205) 532-4500

LEE WOODWARD  
EDITOR

May 3, 1991

Brig. Gen. Harold W. Nelson, USA  
Chief of Military History  
U.S. Army Center of Military History  
Southeast Federal Center  
Building 159, Room 538  
Washington, D.C. 20374-5088

General Nelson:

I finally got around to photocopying the published chunks of the transcripts of Col. Nickerson's court martial. Here they are, plus three columns of opinion as to what I believe should be his place in the history of the U.S. Army (and in the early pre-history of NASA).

Reviewing the instalments, this week, I am still uncertain about the "high resolution" term, for the TV reconnaissance satellite, since that term may not have existed, and the transcripts say "high revolution," presumably meaning "high orbital" in later parlance.

This little time-capsule I have looked into suggests a dozen more good Army history research topics. If only I could get a sabbatical from the newspaper, and a small stipend, I would pursue one or two of them!

I have had zero free time for pursuing this and am maddened by the neglect of what should get better treatment from local (Huntsville) historians. But the daily newspaper grind leaves little opportunity for busman holiday excursions such as this one has been so far....

Please let me know your thoughts. Perhaps a collaborator in the work might be nominated. I have very minimal proprietary feelings on it.

Your recent talk at UAH was extremely interesting. Thanks for coming here.

David Bowman



14 May '91

Dear Mr Bowman -

Thanks for sending me your excellent series on Colonel Nickerson. I enjoyed reading it & found your opinion pieces equally enlightening.

I am forwarding the package to Col Tom Sweeney, Director of the Military History Institute at Carlisle Barracks, PA. I have asked him to search the files there to see if there are ancillary materials that might be useful to your research. I have also recommended that he advertise the topic for possible research by a War College student. Those students often have the technical & academic training appropriate to a topic of this type, and we might find an appropriate collaborator for you.

Again, thanks for sharing your work.

Sincerely,

Harold Nelson



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
U.S. ARMY MILITARY HISTORY INSTITUTE  
CARLISLE BARRACKS  
CARLISLE, PENNSYLVANIA 17013-5008



REPLY TO  
ATTENTION OF

May 21, 1991

Office of the Director

Mr. David Bowman  
Huntsville News  
2111 Clinton Avenue  
Huntsville, Alabama 35805

Dear Mr. Bowman:

Brigadier General Harold Nelson has forwarded to the U.S. Army Military History Institute your photocopied articles on the court martial of John C. Nickerson, Jr. The material has been placed in our biographical sketch files, which are open to the scholars and members of the general public who use our holdings for research on military history topics. We appreciate this addition to our sources on missile development.

Enclosed is a working bibliography on the Nickerson case (BibFile-"Weapons-Missiles"). The pertinent pages cited thereon from the Betts and McDaniel interviews and from the Air University Periodical Index are also enclosed at no charge.

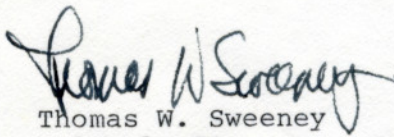
Most of our books, if not available in your area, if in good condition, and if published after 1914, may be borrowed through interlibrary loan procedures, which you must initiate at your local library. Up to six items at a time may be borrowed for sixty days. Periodicals and manuscript materials do not circulate, but photocopies of selected items may be purchased.

Photocopying service is available at a minimum charge of \$3.50, which covers the cost of research and copying the first six pages. An additional fee of \$.10 per page is prescribed for the seventh and each succeeding page. A check or money order for the exact amount, made payable to the "Finance Officer," must be received here before photocopied materials can be sent to you. (Authority: Army Regulation 37-60, dated 3 April 1989.) Photocopying service for each patron is limited to 100 pages per year.

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You are cordially invited to visit the Military History Institute, which is open Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., except federal holidays. Enclosed is a brochure that describes in general our holdings and services.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Thomas W. Sweeney". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial "T" and a long, sweeping underline.

Thomas W. Sweeney  
Colonel, TC  
Director

Enclosures



USAMHI  
RefBranch  
js May 91

joint

**THE COURT MARTIAL OF COLONEL  
JOHN C. NICKERSON, JR., 1956-57**

A Working Bibliography

A case of interservice competition over developing the Jupiter missile. See:

Armacost, Michael H. The Politics of Weapons Innovation. NY: Columbia UP, 1969. pp. 124-128. UA23.173A7.

Bergaust, Erik. Reaching for the Stars. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960. Chap. 16. TL781.85V6B4, AWC Lib.

Betts, Austin, W. Oral hist transcript, Carlisle Barracks, Tab 6, pp. 3-7. Arch.

McDaniel, John L. Oral hist transcript, Carlisle Barracks, 1985. pp. 121-124. Arch.

Medaris, John B. Countdown for Decision. NY: Putnam's, 1960. Chaps X-XI. UL407.16M4.

Pearson, Drew, and Anderson, Jack. U.S.A.--Second-Class Power? NY: Simon & Schuster, 1958. Chap XII. E835P42.

**See also:** - AUPI 1956-58 vol. (q.v. Nickerson, John C.)