

RTG out of Andrews to the Cape,”* recalled Dassoulas. The device was kept overnight at the APL in Laurel, Maryland, after Carpenter obtained it from Martin. “We decided he should just bring it over here to APL in his car. I met him in the lobby and we put it in one of the labs, with the rooms on each side vacated.” The guards were all instructed what to do and how to handle safety and security. The generator was in Florida the following evening, flown down by Carpenter and the pilot.⁵⁰ Finally, on 29 June 1961, after a 24-hour launch delay, a Thor-Able rocket launched three satellites simultaneously—including the first orbiting of an RTG in space.

Thus, two-and-a-half years after its debut on President Eisenhower’s desk, the quiet technology made the front page headlines again. The *New York Journal American* of Thursday, 29 June 1961 announced:

U.S. ORBITS ATOMIC BATTERY

According to the newspaper “The successful orbiting of the nuclear device... gives American scientists a significant lead over Russia in the race to harness atomic power for space exploration.”⁵¹

The AEC made efforts to capitalize on that first space-nuclear success by announcing in September that the “World’s First ‘Atomic Battery’ In Space Continues to Operate Successfully” after ten weeks in orbit.⁵² In October, Seaborg promoted the atom in space and advocated future applications of nuclear power in space before an international symposium of space scientists and engineers looking back on the success of SNAP-3A on Transit:

The presence of the ‘atomic battery’ in the satellite is a symbol of a ‘marriage’ that was bound to occur—between Space and the Atom. We have known for some time that the two were made for each other. No one would be tempted, at the present time, to abandon other sources of energy for space. However, the atom has made greater strides toward coming of age for space application in the past few years than many of us could have hoped. The day is not far off when atomic energy will be available in many different packages for practical use in space vehicles.⁵³

*Both Carpenter and Dassoulas recalled that the device was flown to Florida on Saturday for an expected Sunday night launch which was delayed until Monday night. Official records show, however, that the launch occurred on Thursday 29 June 1961.