

tions of technical development . . .

Second, it will induce a psychological drag into the vast program that has just begun to build promising technical momentum. . . .¹⁰

By early November, the space journal pressed for a new national space policy and a Fiscal 1965 space budget “based on solid elements of national self-interest. . . .”¹¹ A week later Khrushchev put Russia back into the manned lunar landing race by his statement that Russia had not given up on its lunar program and that his previous statements of being ready to “consider” a joint manned lunar landing program had been misinterpreted.¹²

After Kennedy’s assassination, editorialists tended to stress the positives of this “truly modern president.” In his last major speech, at the U.S. Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine in San Antonio, the day before his assassination in Dallas, Kennedy related an anecdote of the Irish boys who, when in doubt about trying to get over an orchard wall on their treks across the countryside, tossed their hats over the wall and then had no choice but to follow them. The president had said: “This Nation has tossed its cap over the wall of space, and we have no choice but to follow it.” One editorial concluded that “when the first American astronauts return safely from the moon, as they surely will, we should remember that it was John F. Kennedy. . . who tossed our caps over the wall of space and made us surmount it successfully.”¹³ The RTG program benefitted both from Kennedy’s support of technology and from the national optimism.

Other events competed for attention during the last summer and fall of the Kennedy Administration. The massive “March on Washington” against poverty, the rioting of blacks for their civil rights, and the repercussions of the assassination of President Diem¹⁴ of Vietnam predominated in the media. The next steps in moving the isotopic power devices toward space flight tests on an operational prototype satellite went almost unnoticed that fall. In late September, a Navy Transit 5B navigational satellite powered completely by an isotope power generator was launched from Vandenberg Air Force Base. Space journals in October¹⁵ briefly recounted this flight debut of the SNAP-9A. Clearly, the headline-grabbing days of the pioneering SNAP devices were over. A successful SNAP-9A launch on another Transit on 5 December 1963 did not even receive mention in either the space journals or the popular news magazines.