

continued to be received, the AEC prepared and distributed a reassuring press release stating that the recently collected data “clearly indicates that the fuel of a space nuclear generator burned up as expected last April after its spacecraft failed to achieve orbit.”⁴²

Carpenter remembered: “We looked at aborts as ‘good tests.’”⁴³ Dix recalled proudly: “We had done an analysis which spotted just where that RTG would go down—in the Mozambique Channel;” (he also indicated that this predicted burnup analysis had been published in the open literature prior to the launch).⁴⁴ Strengthened by the “test” provided by the 9A abort, the safety program went forward as an integral part of the growing technology. As Kerr explained, the safety program pre-mission reviews and tests contributed to the design of the SNAP devices and thus contributed to a phenomenal record of successful missions while also predicting and controlling the hazards from the few failures.⁴⁵

The 9A abort led to a change in the fuel form, according to Kerr.⁴⁶ Eventually, with larger radioisotopic fuel loads, the basic safety concept changed from burn-up and dispersion” to “intact re-entry.” By the time that new concept was integrated into an RTG-powered space mission, however, the mechanisms for interagency review and meticulous safety analysis were well established and in operation.

Crossroads for New Thrust and Directions

In late 1963, space and nuclear scientists and technologists attempted to foresee how the new President, Lyndon Johnson, would proceed with the space program. Johnson came to his new position with considerable legislative experience in space and military activities as a result of his committee assignments while a member of Congress and his chairmanship of the National Aeronautics and Space Council after his election as vice president. In his first address to a joint session of Congress on 27 November 1963, Johnson pledged to continue Kennedy’s ideas and ideals including “The dream of conquering the vastness of space...”⁴⁷

Johnson’s first decision in space priorities was viewed positively by Aviation Week: “The national space program has taken a significant step forward with President Lyndon B. Johnson’s decision to develop a military orbital space station.”⁴⁸ Two weeks later, however, the president trimmed the FY 1965