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While the Soviet Union was winning the space race, people in the USSR sent each other holiday cards. New Years Day, a very important holiday, led to cards like the one pictured here. Translated into English, the main Russian-language greeting says “Happy New Year!” The scrolled greeting says “New successes in space!” The letters which look like CCCP in English are the abbreviation for USSR. Click on the image for a better view.

At the start of the space race, America was far behind. The Soviet Union had taken the United States—and the rest of the world—by surprise when it launched the satellite Sputnik in October 1957.

Using the world's first ICBM (intercontinental ballistic missile)—the R-7—the USSR had achieved a major coup. Americans began to worry that the Soviets could launch nuclear warheads aimed at their country. (Only a few years later, Soviet missiles in Cuba could have killed 80 million Americans within ten minutes of launch.)

Meanwhile, the United States endured rocket-launch failures. Two months after Sputnik, the U.S. first tried to launch a satellite. The Vanguard rocket failed to perform successfully (on December 6, 1957).

Wernher von Braun's new designs for U.S. rockets were not-yet ready. Until they were, Americans would be endlessly humiliated and the Russians would continue to score more "firsts" in the space race.

The Soviets launched Sputnik 2, a larger and heavier satellite than its predecessor, in November of 1957. The American press and public were upset and demanded to know why the United States was so far behind the USSR.

Partly in response to such public reaction, Congress created NASA (the National Aeronautics and Space Administration) to develop an effective space program.

On January 31, 1958 the United States successfully launched its first satellite: Explorer. The rocket that launched it was the Jupiter C, a von Braun-team design.

Now both countries could spy on each other from space. The first U.S. spy photo, taken from an American satellite, was transmitted on August 18, 1960. It is of a Soviet military site in Siberia.

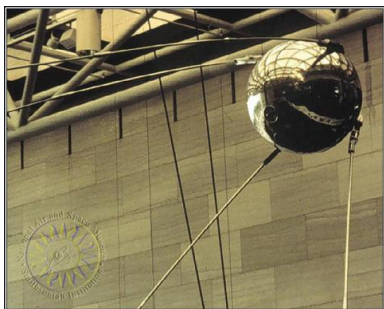
See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/THE-SPACE-RACE-History-of-Flight)

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See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/THE-SPACE-RACE-History-of-Flight>

Media Stream



Sputnik - Soviet Satellite

Image depicting a Sputnik I replica, at the Smithsonian's Air and Space Museum, online courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Sputnik-Soviet-Satellite>

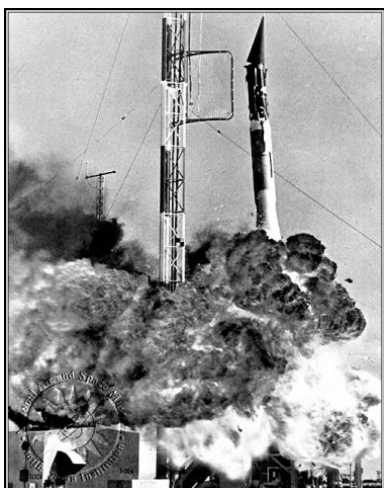


Launch of ICBM - Russian R-7 Missile

Image online, courtesy the [Smithsonian Air and Space Museum](http://www.smithsonian.gov) website.

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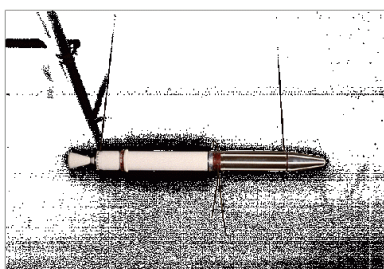


Vanguard Rocket - Failure

Image online, courtesy the [Smithsonian Air and Space Museum](http://www.smithsonian.gov).

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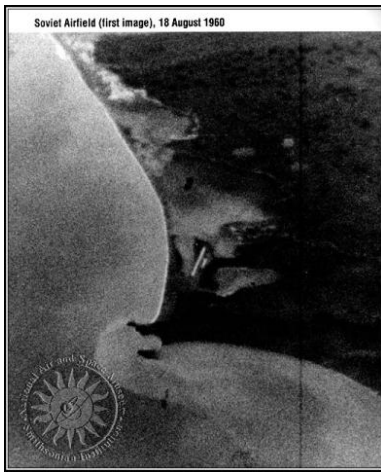


Explorer - First Successful U.S. Satellite

Image online, courtesy the [Smithsonian Air and Space Museum](http://www.smithsonian.gov).

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First U.S. Satellite Spy Photo - Soviet Airfield

Image online, courtesy the U.S. National Archives via the Smithsonian Air & Space Museum.

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THE SPACE RACE

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Space Race - American Rocket Failures

Clip of America's rocket failures, compiled by NASA. Online, courtesy NASA.

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Sputnik - Reaction by U.S. Government

From *The Right Stuff*, a film about test pilots, Mercury 7 astronauts and the early days of the space race. Copyright, Warner Brothers, all rights reserved. Clip provided here as fair use for educational purposes and to acquaint new viewers with the production.

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NASA - The First Decade

NASA documentary, U.S. National Archives.

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