The Vanguard Series

This is the eighteenth in a series of articles about unmanned satellites on postage stamps. This article features the Vanguard-series satellites. Vanguard-1 was the second successful satellite launched by the U.S. on 17 March 1958, having been preceded by Explorer-1 launched on 31 January 1958. As mentioned in the Explorer-1 article in this series, Vanguard would have been the first U.S. satellite had there not been a failure of the first announced launch attempt in December of 1957. That failure allowed Explorer-1 to become the first successful U.S. satellite.

The Navy’s Project Vanguard was one of many disappointments and embarrassments for the U.S. after the successful launch of both Sputnik-1 and Sputnik-2 by the Soviet Union in late 1957. A second Vanguard failed in February 1958 before the first successful Vanguard was launched. (By that time the second Explorer, Explorer-2, had been attempted, but failed to orbit.) Of the eleven Vanguard orbital attempts, only three Vanguards were launched successfully, all eight others were failures, in the years 1957 through 1959.

The Vanguard satellites look more like what one would expect of a satellite, rather than the rocket-like shape of the Explorer-1 satellite. Vanguards have basically spherical bodies with antennas that are attached perpendicular to the body, unlike the folded-back antennas on Sputnik-1 that appear to give it motion even in a static image. Each of the three successful Vanguards had a unique appearance, as can be seen in the reference images available on the Website developed by the authors. Both Vanguard-1 and 2 can be identified on many postal items. However there are a large number of items where the images are quite small and the identification is not entirely clear. These items are designated “like-Vanguard-2” in the checklist that accompanies this article, since they appear to have a body and antennas similar to those of Vanguard-2. Vanguard-3 is known to appear on only one postal item, a Souvenir Sheet issued by Chad in 1998 (Michel BL248).

Readers are referred to the authors’ Website for reference images of the satellites in the Vanguard series, as well as images of launch covers and postal items that feature these satellites. As a complement to this article, a checklist of Vanguard satellites is presented both here and on the Website developed by the authors http://www.cira.colostate.edu/ramm/hillger/satellites.htm. E-mail correspondence is welcome. Don Hillger can be reached at hillger@cira.colostate.edu and Garry Toth at garry_toth@hotmail.com.

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Identity Stamp

Member Profile

Brian G Vincent of New Zealand.

Brian has recently joined our Society. He has a keen interest in both astronomy (he still has the first book on this subject given by his parents for Christmas in 1962) and in space flight. His interest in space flights began at the time when the first Sputnik was in orbit and he remembers clearly its "bleeps" that were broadcast on the radio network news.

He has been a stamp collector since around 8 years of age. Over the years this has included collecting stamps and covers relating to the space topic (mostly items from USA and Russia) and currently he has a particular interest in rocket mail. This area of his collecting interests has received more attention in recent months leading him to join both our Society as well as the Space Unit of USA.

Brian is also a member of the Royal Philatelic Society of New Zealand and is a Fellow and currently President of that Society. He was Editor of their handbook "Postal Stamps of New Zealand Volume VIII". Brian's other collections include Rugby football (exhibited nationally and internationally), jazz, Papua and New Zealand.

Brian has just been nominated as New Zealand's representative for the FIP Commission of Astrophilately.