Science in the News

Transfer of Projects Gives Air Force Major Role in Military Space Activities

A new assignment of areas of responsibility, made last month by the Department of Defense, has given the Air Force the major role in military space activities. The move gave the Air Force responsibility for development, production, and operation of all military space vehicles, including the Saturn booster, the Army's major project.

Secretary of Defense Neil McElroy, in signing the new policy order, effectively removed the Advanced Research Projects Agency from the space systems field. Four satellite programs that had been under ARPA have been assigned to the military services, with the Air Force the big gainer. With the projects will go more than half of ARPA's budget of $455 million for fiscal year 1960.

Programs Transferred

The four satellite projects that were transferred from ARPA to the military services are all in the development stage. The two that were assigned to the Air Force were Midas, a satellite system employing infrared reception to give early warning of ballistic missile attack, and Samos, a system of satellites to be used for reconnaissance. Transit, a project which would use satellites for improved navigation, was transferred to the Navy, the service which had been working on it as the primary agent for ARPA. Responsibility for Project Notus, a large satellite system designed for use in communications, was given to the Army. The project calls for instantaneous and delayed relay of messages by satellites hovering above a fixed point on the earth.

The major program retained by ARPA is Project Discoverer, which is involved more with development of space flight techniques than with purely military objectives. Eventual transfer of this program, probably to the Air Force, is also planned, however. Despite the various transfers ARPA will continue to operate, but with a new role. The agency was established in 1958 to coordinate and manage advanced research projects, particularly those of the military that cut across the traditional service missions. The agency's new role, it is believed, will be to organize basic research in space techniques that will eventually bear on the country's military programs. It will be, the observers suggest, a relatively small technical group to study and evaluate advanced projects.

Civilian Space Agency

These developments in the Department of Defense are expected to have no immediate effect on the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. A call has been made, however, for closer liaison with NASA. The need for a better method of securing such cooperation became evident during Senate hearings conducted last spring by Stuart Symington (D-Mo.).

Informed observers of the Pentagon's various space programs suggest that the new assignment represents the beginning of a slow transformation of the country's military space program from the confused state that became evident during a number of Congressional inquiries to a more orderly and sound state. Congressional pressure, recent Soviet successes, and the influence of Herbert York, defense director of research and engineering, are reported to be the major forces behind the change.

U.S. Specialists Describe Soviet Commitments to Education

Last month the U.S. Office of Education released Soviet Commitment to Education, *a 135-page report of the first official United States education mission to the U.S.S.R., which took place 8 May-6 June 1958. An 11-member team headed by Laurence G. Derthick, U.S. commissioner of education, visited approximately 100 Soviet educational institutions. Excerpts from the report's sections on primary and secondary education, with particular emphasis on science education, follow:*

The one fact that most impressed us in the U.S.S.R. was the extent to which the Nation is committed to education as a means of national advancement. . . . Tremendous responsibilities are therefore placed on Soviet schools, and comprehensive support is provided for them by all segments and agencies of Soviet society. . . .

Wherever we turned we heard the slogan: "Reach and over-reach America." And everywhere, the people seem to respond in the conviction that education, in addition to hard work and the postponement of many creature comforts, is the best means of winning world supremacy.

Education reaches far beyond school-age children and youth and is eagerly sought by hundreds of thousands of full-time workers who are also full-time students; hundreds of thousands of others take correspondence courses. Many of these correspondence students also hope to qualify for university entrance. They do this because being well educated is the key to advancement.

And they have been building schools and universities at a rapid pace. Down on the borders of China where only a half-century ago the people were almost 100 percent illiterate, we saw thriving schools, an impressive scientific academy, and other institutions that have reduced illiteracy and advanced knowledge to an astonishing degree. From the shores of the Black Sea to remote Siberia we found the attitude summed up in the expression of a Soviet education official: "A child can be born healthy, but he can't be born educated."

There is still a considerable shortage of buildings resulting in part from . . . damage during World War II. . . .

Administration

Even though education in the U.S.S.R. is controlled by the Government and is therefore standardized and regimented, there is some flexibility of operation. Furthermore, decisions on policy, on textbooks, on teacher training, on curriculum, and on similar matters are not always made arbitrarily. We found fairly widespread evidence that