

Vandenberg Missile Questions

From: campbell@ufomind.com (Glenn Campbell, Las Vegas)
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Subject: Vandenberg Missile Questions

[From an AMSAT (Amateur Satellite) mailing list...]

Sometime in the last week, someone posted a notice regarding a pending launch from Vandenberg AFB. Apparently, the launch took place at sometime after 1700 PST. We picked up the launch quite accidentally while in route to the Anaheim HRO.

Southern California is currently under the influence of moderate off shore winds from a high to our north so visibility is near infinite with low levels of atmospheric moisture.

This raised several questions I would like to post:

What was the official launch time from VAFB?

Did we in fact see a stage separation and ignition?

If so, how long into the flight was this?

Why did the light from last stage disappear so quickly? Was this the point at which the vehicle left the atmosphere and so lost contact with gases and water vapor which could then reflect light after reacting with the combustion products from the engine or did this stage have only a short burn?

Lastly, for the meteorologically inclined: When the vehicle was actively moving through the atmosphere, the combustion trail (vapor trail?) left behind was rather straight. Within thirty minutes or so, viewing the trail as it reflected the rays of the fast setting sun, the trail acquired a variety of loops and twists such that it appeared as though the vehicle that made it had done spirals in the sky, what is it about the winds and the trail last causes this (a 'typical' vapor trail just dissi

Thanks in advance for all assistance.

Ralph G. Sbragia
Construction Safety Professional
KD6FYT
direct Email to: KD6FYT@AMSAT.ORG
or
sbragiar@deltanet.com (home)
or
sbragiar@mta.net (work, 0730-1700 PT only)

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Technical contact: webmaster@ufomind.com

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