

Reflections of the Class of 1961

“OCTOBER 4th, 1957: A MOMENT THAT CHANGED OUR WORLD”

By Jake Hoover '61

Less than a month into our Freshman year, the media headlines blared forth a new challenge to the young men in Hartman, Dietz, and Meyran Halls. Young men, who, just a few years earlier, had practiced “duck and cover” drills in their elementary schools, and who had family discussions about the wisdom of building a back-yard bomb shelter, and who had been inundated with the emotional propoganda of the “Cold War” since the Soviets had joined us in Nuclear Age - we all paused and took a moment to “listen up”. A new word - Sputnik - and a new serious reality as we were just getting a grasp of college life and academic studies.

This Soviet victory in space could not be glibly explained away by Western pundits as simply a case of Russia's captured German rocket scientists were better than the German scientists brought to the United States at the end of World War II. This was a serious challenge to the eighteen year olds in the class of 1961.

Immediate response by our government and universities was directed to the natural sciences and mathematics. Vinnie Haag and Don Western fed their “New Math” textbook chapters to the undergrads as fast as the ditto machines could print them. College professors across the nation were preparing new curriculae in chemistry, physics, and mathematics for both university and high school students. A dozen years later, a young president's promise was fulfilled with that “one giant leap for mankind”. So many spin-offs of the Sputnik event have permeated every phase of our lives: Medicine, transportation, communications - look at where we are today, and connect the dots back to that small Soviet sphere which flew overhead!



