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Einstein's satellite

NASA launches new satellite to test Albert Einstein's predictions

By Andrew Bridges
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES — NASA on Tuesday launched a \$750 million satellite conceived during the Eisenhower administration to test two of Albert Einstein's fundamental predictions about the universe.

The Gravity Probe B satellite blasted off from an oceanside pad at Vandenberg Air Force Base at 9:57 a.m. PDT. The launch, aboard a Delta II rocket, came one day after officials scrubbed an earlier attempt.

The satellite was to separate from the rocket and begin its 18-month mission 75 min-

utes after liftoff.

The launch of the 6,800-pound, Lockheed Martin Corp.-built spacecraft marked the end of the longest development period of any mission in the history of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

Scientists first proposed what became Gravity Probe B in 1959, a year after the launch of the first American satellite and the creation of NASA. Over the decades, it weathered more than a half-dozen attempts at cancellation amid concerns over cost overruns and technical hurdles.

The Earth-orbiting satellite

was built to test two of Einstein's predictions about the nature of space and time: how the rotating Earth warps and twists the fabric that combines the two.

Scientists at Stanford University designed the spacecraft around four spheres of quartz the size of ping-pong balls. They are the most perfect spheres ever made.

Theory predicts that by spinning up the satellite in space with a distant star and setting the balls spinning, their alignment should shift off like small but measurable amounts in response to the mass rotation of the Earth.

Nichols on trial

Judge to allow testimony from Fortier

By Tim Talley
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

McALESTER, Okla. — The prosecution's star witness in the Terry Nichols murder trial began testifying Tuesday after a judge allowed him to discuss the alleged conspiracy between Nichols and Timothy McVeigh to bomb the Oklahoma City federal building.

Michael Fortier's testimony focused on how he, Nichols and McVeigh met as Army buddies stationed together at Fort Riley, Kan.

Two years after Fortier left the Army, McVeigh showed up unannounced at his home in Kingman, Ariz., shortly after the April 19, 1993, government raid at the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, in which about 80 people died. McVeigh was upset over the raid.

"He was speaking about the fire that had occurred in Waco, Texas," Fortier said. "He was excited and angry about it."

The Oklahoma City bombing came exactly two years after the raid, and prosecutors say it was a twisted attempt at revenge.

Nichols' attorneys had asked the judge to prohibit conspiracy testimony from Fortier because he wasn't charged as a conspirator.

Judge Steven Taylor said evidence in Nichols' trial indicates there was a conspiracy between McVeigh and Nichols. He also said that previous federal testimony from Fortier indicates he was part of that conspiracy.

Fortier, serving 12 years in prison for knowing about the bombing plot, but not telling authorities, was brought to the courthouse

under heavy security Tuesday.

In a hearing after the jury was sent home Monday, attorneys for Nichols claimed the prosecution is withholding evidence that is crucial to his defense.

Federal law enforcement authorities testified at the hearing that the material Nichols' lawyers are seeking may not exist.

Chief among evidence the defense says it wants handed over is purported security video footage of the attack that suggests McVeigh may have had accomplices at the scene.

In a 90-page motion filed last week, the attorneys asked the judge to dismiss first-degree murder charges against Nichols because prosecutors have not attempted to obtain evidence of McVeigh's connection with other co-conspirators.

Current and former FBI and Secret Service agents testified that the existence of such evidence is purely speculative.

"There is no such tape," said Jon Hershey, a retired FBI agent who was a primary investigator in the April 19, 1995, bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building, which killed 168 people.

Taylor was to rule on Nichols' motion Tuesday night.

Nichols and McVeigh were convicted of federal charges for the deaths of eight federal agents in the April 19, 1995, bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah building. McVeigh was executed in 2001 and Nichols was sentenced to life in prison.

Nichols, 49, faces 161 state murder charges for the other victims and a fetus of one of the victims.


“He was speaking about the fire that had occurred in Waco, Texas. He was excited and angry about it.”

— Michael Fortier, friend of Nichols and McVeigh, on Nichols' behavior

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