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(Picture credits: NASA)

Explorer 1 launch celebration (1958)

Space agency/country: NASA
Mission: *Explorer 1*

On 31 January 1958, the US launched their first satellite into space from Cape Canaveral, Florida. *Explorer 1* was a joint project of the Army Ballistic Missile Agency (ABMA) in Huntsville, Alabama, and the University of Iowa. The first-ever satellite to be launched into orbit was the Soviet Union's *Sputnik*, launched in 1957. This event contributed to the 'Space Race', and it led the US to also launch its first satellite into orbit the following year.

Dr. James Van Allen (University of Iowa) was one of the main contributors to the *Explorer 1* mission. He theorised that the satellite could end up being saturated by very strong radiation from a belt of charged particles trapped in space by Earth's magnetic field. The existence of those radiation belts was later confirmed, and they became known as the *Van Allen Belts*, in his honour.

For more information:

<https://www.nasa.gov/history/explorer-1-overview/>
<https://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/space-race>