Langley Built Satellite May Fail To Orbit

POINT ARGUELLO, Calif. (AP)—The United States sent into orbit Thursday a satellite it hoped would bloom into a "Christmas star." But two hours after launch word came that the blossoming was in doubt.

A National Aeronautics and Space Administration spokesman said that on the second orbital pass no radio signals were received from that part of the orbital package supposed to unfold into a reflective orb. Called Air Density Explorer, the satellite was designed and built at Langley Research Center.

The device was intended to measure the resistance or drag of the upper atmosphere at high latitudes. It was hoped the shining sphere would be visible during the holiday season—and for three to five years afterward—wherever around the globe its orbit and twilight coincided.

This was the sequence. Twenty-eight minutes after the 10:49 a.m. launch from this naval missile facility an orbiting cannister was to eject a package which inflating into a 12-foot-diameter aluminum and plastic sphere, covered with polka-dots.

A tracking station at South Point, Hawaii, received radio signals from both cannister and package, indicating an orbit.

A tracking station in South Africa then reported that on the second pass it received signals from the cannister only.

At this point, a space agency spokesman said this could mean either that the package failed to achieve a stable orbit, or its radio failed.

The final word on success was to be by photograph of the inflated orb from the South Africa station.

‘Christmas Star’ Goes Into Orbit

By Associated Press

POINT ARGUELLO, Calif.—The "Christmas Star" satellite has achieved orbit and should be visible at twilight over the holiday season—and for years after, it was announced today.

A National Aeronautics and Space Administration spokesman said both the 12-foot diameter balloon and the cannister from which it was ejected in space were sighted with binoculars at an optical tracking station in Australia.

The satellite was launched Thursday and until the sighting it was in doubt whether it had, 1. achieved orbit, 2. inflated as planned.