



September 14, 2018 — It launched rovers to Mars, sent robotic probes to the moon, comets and the asteroids, put astronomical observatories into orbit and deployed the first GPS satellites.

And now, after three decades of service, the Delta II rocket is entering history.

The final flight of the Delta II will not only mark an end for the venerable launch vehicle, but will also conclude the first pioneering era of U.S. rocketry.

The Delta II first put itself on the map by enabling everyone else to do the same.

Entering service on Valentine's Day (Feb. 14) 1989, the maiden Delta II lifted off from Launch Complex 17 at the Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in Florida with the first operational GPS (Global Positioning System) satellite. It was the first of 48 GPS missions for the rocket.

The launch vehicle also carried a series of commercial communications satellites, including deploying parts of the Iridium and Globalstar constellations into low Earth orbit.

But the Delta II's most public role came in its service to space exploration.

The rocket launched eight robotic explorers to Mars, including NASA's first rover, Pathfinder, in December 1996, and the twin Mars Exploration Rovers, Spirit and Opportunity, in June and July 2003, respectively. The Mars Global Surveyor (1996) and Mars Odyssey (2001) orbiters, as well as the Phoenix lander (2007) were also highlights among the Delta II's missions to the Red Planet.

Delta II also launched NASA's Gravity Recovery and Interior Laboratory (GRAIL) probes to the moon in 2011, marking the rocket's final launch from Florida; the MESSENGER mission to orbit the planet Mercury earlier that same year; and six asteroid and comet-focused spacecraft, including the Near Earth Asteroid Rendezvous (NEAR) probe in 1996, the Stardust comet sample return mission in 1999, and Dawn, which after leaving Earth in 2007 became the first spacecraft to visit two celestial bodies, the asteroids Vesta and Ceres.

Other NASA Delta II launches of historical note included the 2001 Genesis probe that returned samples of the solar wind; the Spitzer Space Telescope in 2003; and the Kepler space observatory to find Earth-size extrasolar planets in 2009.

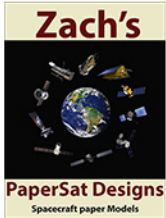
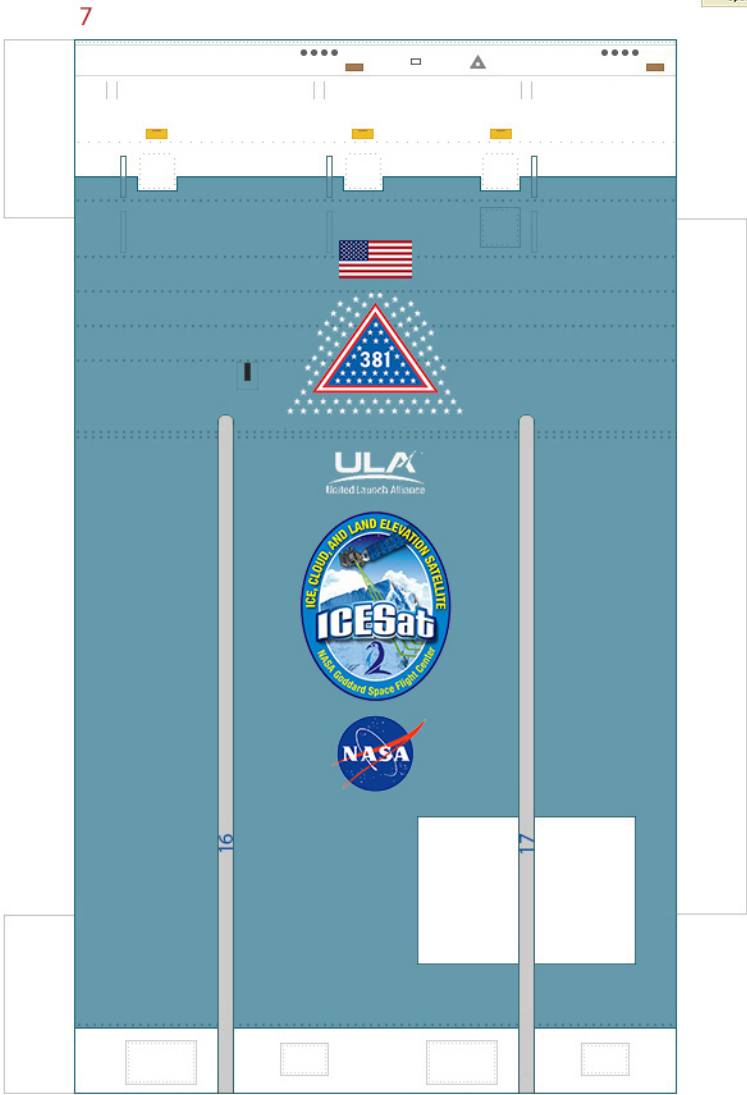
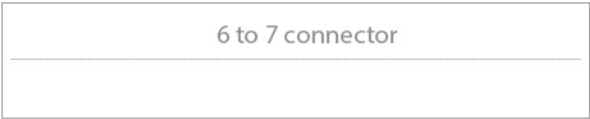
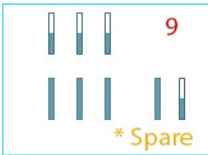
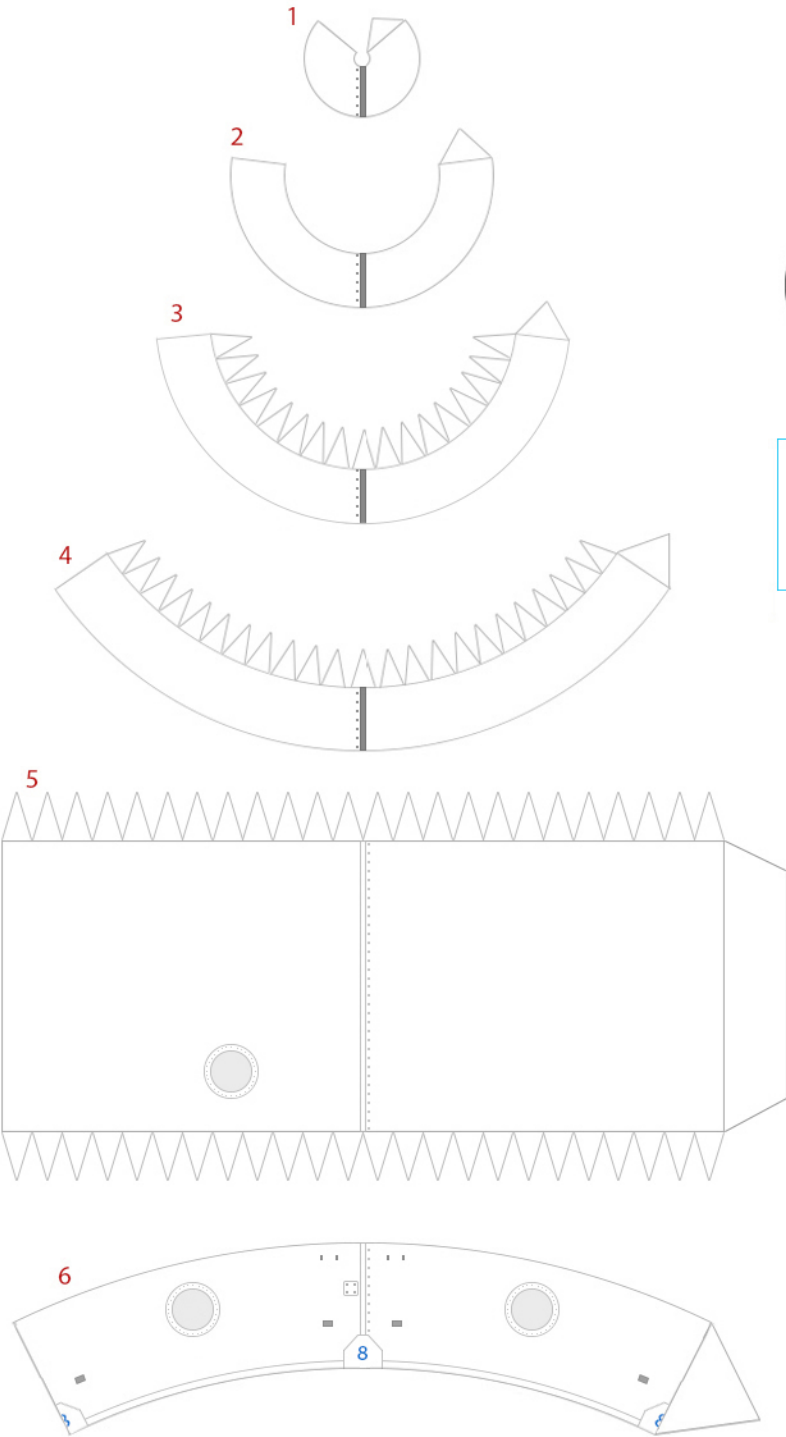
The Delta II's final launch, NASA's ICESat-2, is designed to track changes in land and sea ice with unparalleled detail.

The Delta II experienced only one complete failure in its 30-year history. On Jan. 17, 1997, a Delta II carrying a GPS satellite exploded 13 seconds into flight, raining debris down on the Florida launch complex and some nearby parked cars.

The ICESat-2 mission marked Delta II's 100th consecutive success, an unprecedented record among launch vehicles.

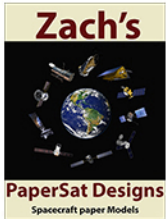
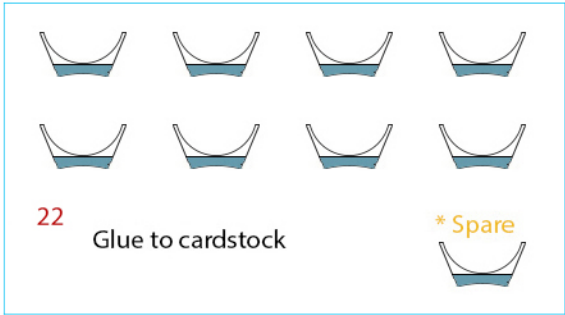
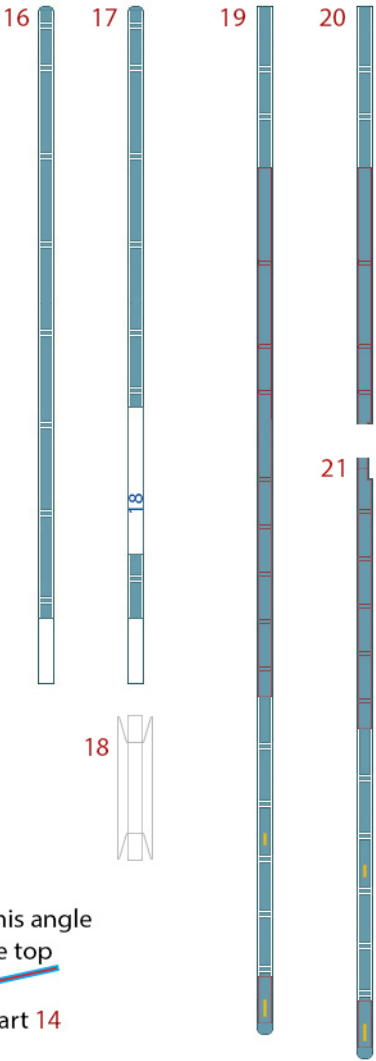
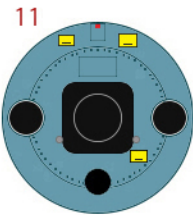
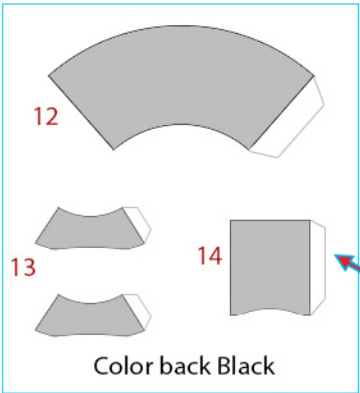
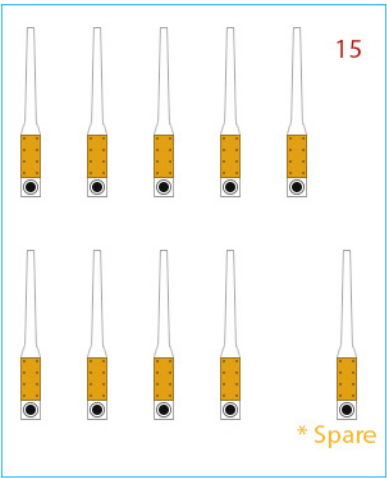
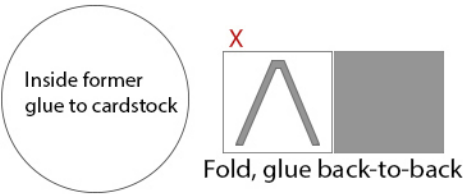
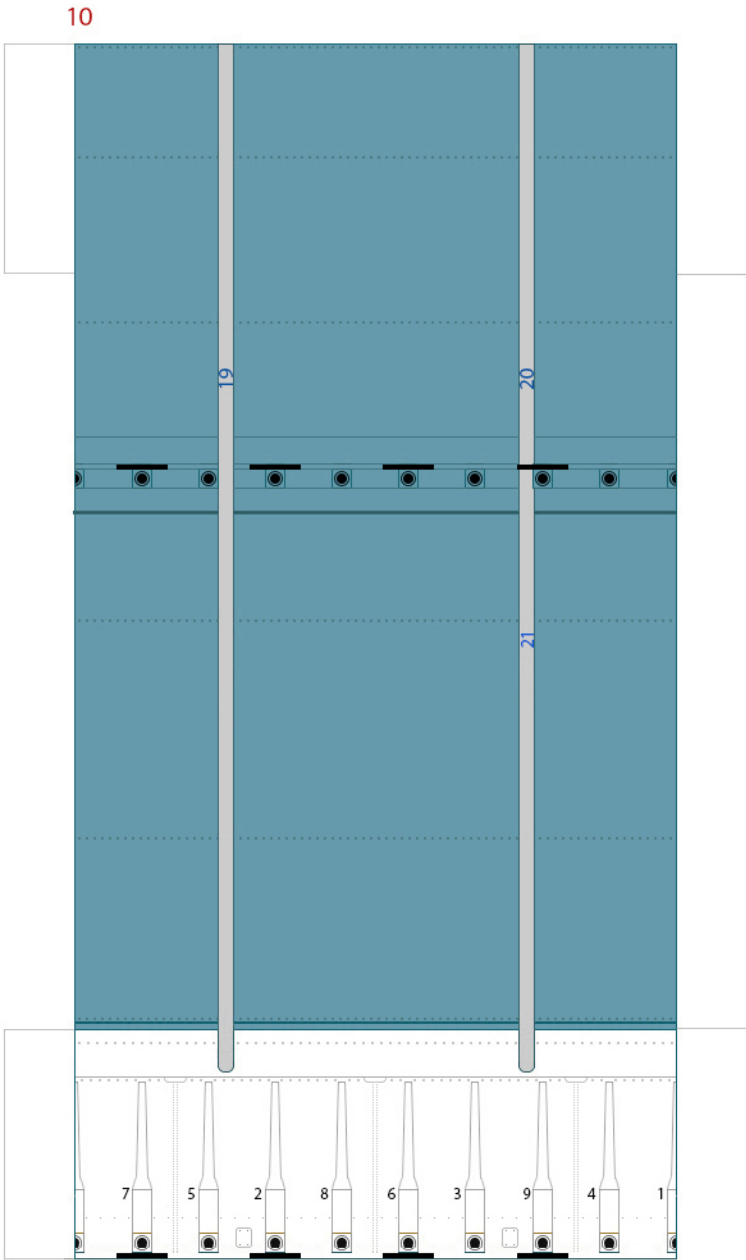


Delta II - Last Flight Model

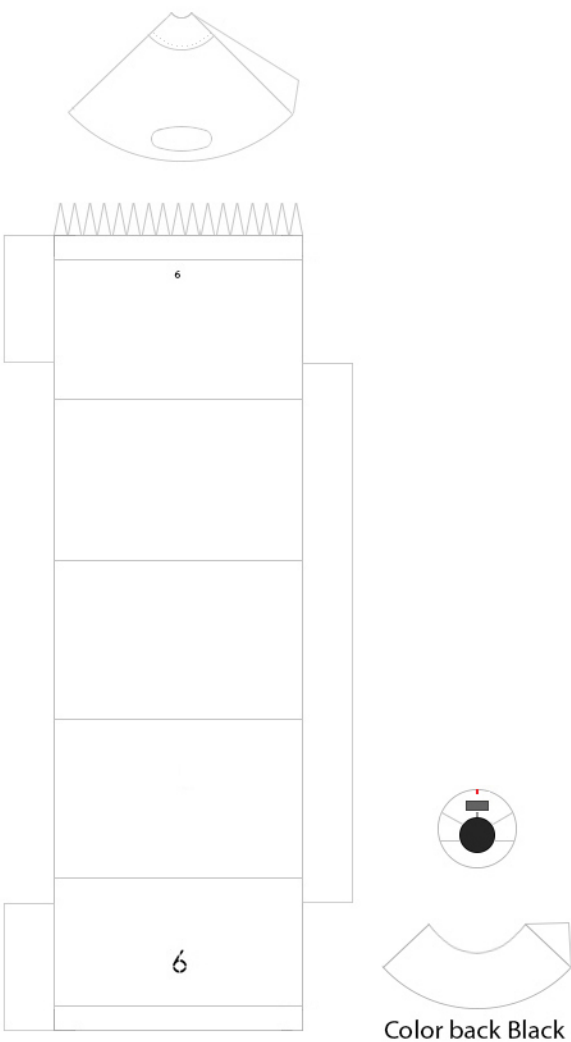
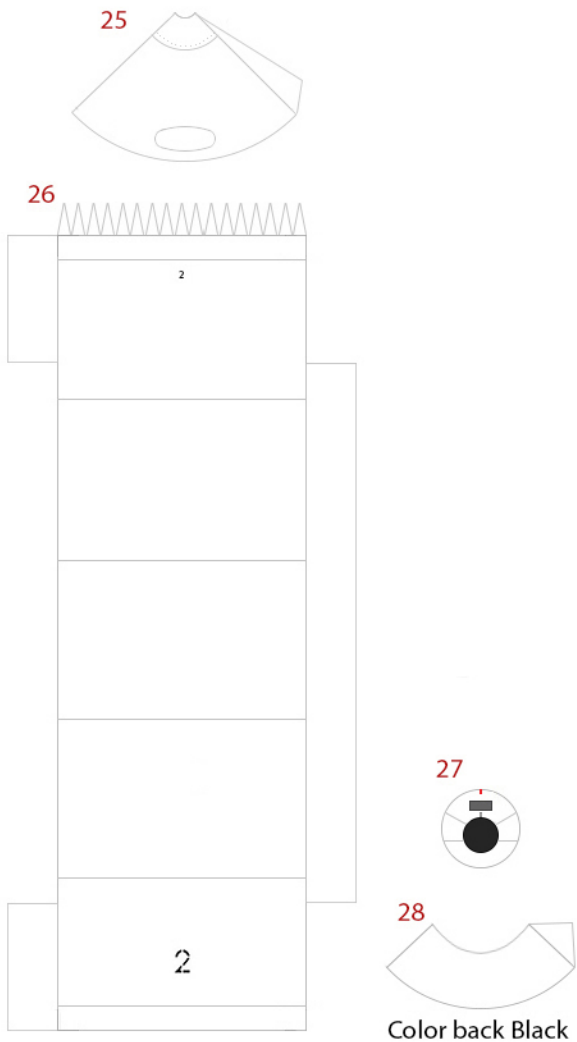
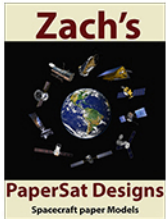


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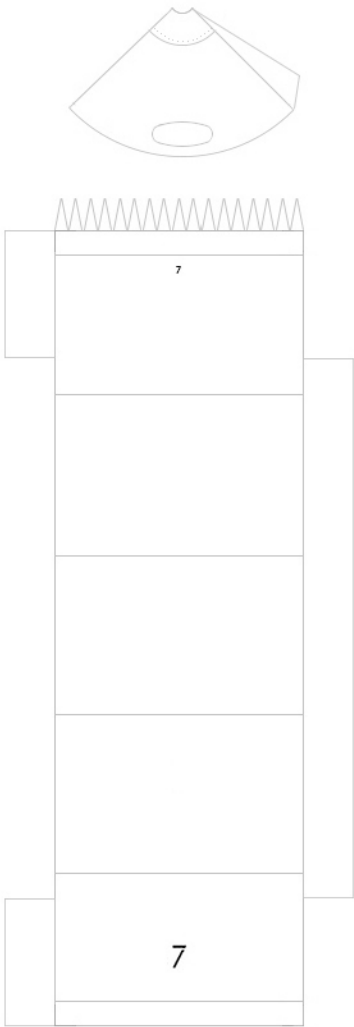
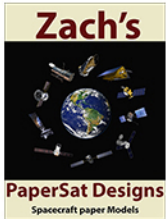
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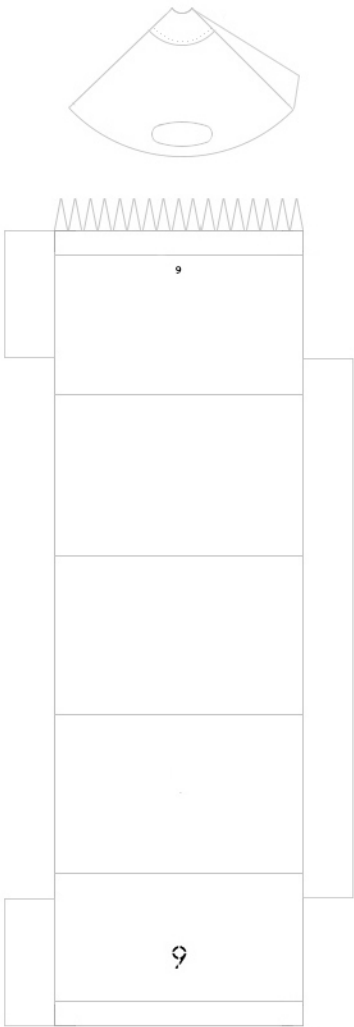
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