



AREA 51 SPECIAL PROJECTS

One of the major fears as Project Oxcart came into being was the discovery of its design innovations that would enable the Soviet Union to develop countermeasures, which would reduce the A-12's value for reconnaissance. Few doubted that the Soviet's TALL KING radar would be able to identify and track the A-12 despite its small, nonpersistent radar return.

The CIA needed to know what the Soviets were seeing when they tracked the A-12. Thus one of the reasons for the recruitment of an ultra-secret team of specialists having various and unique fields to become the pioneers of the cutting edge technology required to successfully advance the aeronautical. This small team probably did more to win the Cold War than most any other single group in the nation. (Think Red Flag and Top Gun) (Think Star Wars and beyond)(Think now).

North of the Lockheed hangars the Groom dry lake was rimed with a RatScat array of radar systems, threat simulators and optical systems used for local tracking and RCS (Radar Cross Section) evaluations. Housed in its own ultra secret inner sanctum

amongst the radar systems was an unpainted two-story barracks that had been converted to host rooms of electronic equipment manned by engineers and technical personnel selected for the Special Projects team, a.k.a. the cadre at Area 51 to serve many "customers," something that continues today.

Most Roadrunners knew of the existence of the Special Projects team since this was where the RCS tests were conducted. The early Roadrunners will remember the A-12 model atop a hydraulic pole (pylon) situated on the lakebed with line-of-sight to the building and the vast array of radar systems. However, few if any of the Oxcart participants other than security personnel knew the members of this 23-man special projects group. We were housed and transported separate from any of the other Oxcart teams and reported only to McKinsey or engineers or specialists working for the "The Customer." No books have ever mentioned this segment of Oxcart other than to mention that RCS tests were conducted.

THE SPECIAL PROJECTS TEAM LEGACY:

There is a reason for this lack of notoriety. Some of you will recall towards the end of OXCART that an Army Nike X-band radar system was installed within the radar array about the same time a MiG 23 Fishbed started appearing on the "pole" to be joined later by a couple of MiG-17 Frescos. That was one of Barnes' radar systems when he was in the Army with a Nike unit at Fort Bliss, Texas. It was the "other" projects such as the MiG Have Doughnut, Have Drill, and Have Ferry projects that kept the special projects team sequestered from the rest of the Oxcart teams. Project HAVE DOUGHNUT was the exploitation of a Soviet-built MiG-21F-13 (FISHBED E) fighter-interceptor conducted from 23 January to 8 April 1968, the final months of Project OXCART. Projects HAVE DRILL and HAVE FERRY were two Soviet-built MiG-17F (FRESCO Q) fighter-interceptors exploited from 27 January to 30 June 1969. The exploitation was performed under the direction of Foreign Technology Division by a team of specialists drawn from throughout the USAF and USN, including the Laboratories at Wright-Patterson AFB, the Air Force Flight Test Center, the Naval Air Test Center, Naval Weapons Center, the Air Tactical Command, and the Special Projects team at Area 51. In addition to tracking the dog fights staged between the various MiG models against virtually every fighter in U.S. service, and against SAC's B-52 Stratofortress and B-58 Hustlers to judge the ability of the bombers' countermeasures systems, they performed radar cross-section and propulsion tests that contributed greatly to improvements in U.S. aerial performance in Vietnam. As all you know, during the design and testing of the A-12 we did not have computers so we used slide rules.

One thing the Special Projects team did jointly was their designing and building a computer to interface all the systems to prevent human error during a mission. The computer was programmed to know every switch position and signal level from all the systems and to alert the control room if there was an anomaly. The man-hours to accomplish this were enormous. During this period this group was also involved in the early stages of Projects HAVE BLUE (stealth), the most secret project since the Manhattan Project, "SENIOR TREND" (F-117), and TACIT BLUE.

What was learned during these projects at Area 51 prompted the U.S. Navy to commence Top Gun exercises first at Miramar, California and then Fallon, Nevada. Shortly thereafter the U.S. Air Force commenced its Red Flag exercises at Nellis AFB, Nevada. One can only imagine what has been developed since Star Wars. A glimpse into the control van of the Predator gives one a clue how ancient the special projects team of Project OXCART is now, though they were the cutting edge of technology at that stage of their lives. What would the technological community have done without the Roadrunners to pioneer the way? Our thanks to the Special Projects guys and gal for contributing this account.



Groom Lake - 1959



Drawing by Sammie Gamble depicting the reaction of the EG&G Special Projects team to the CIA announcing the termination of Project Oxcart

EG&G Special Projects Organization #6300 at Groom Lake 1960s



Ralph "Jim" Freedman



T.D. Barnes



Dave Haen

Special Projects team photos will be added as they become available

Team Roster

- | | | | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Babjack, R.J. | Dockter, Marvin R. | Hardy, Leroy C. | Long, James E. | Swenson, Marvin L. |
| Barnes, Thornton D. | Evans, Paul M. | Heaps, Kenneth L. | Luker, Bobby V. | Thomas, Jeff D. |

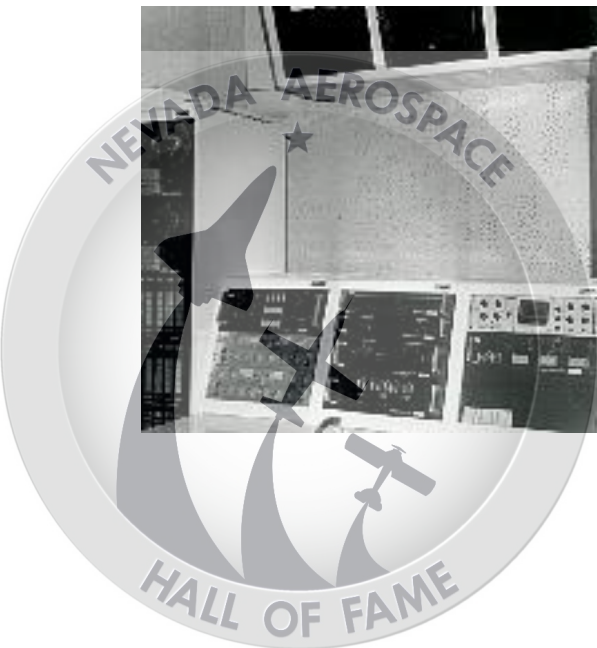
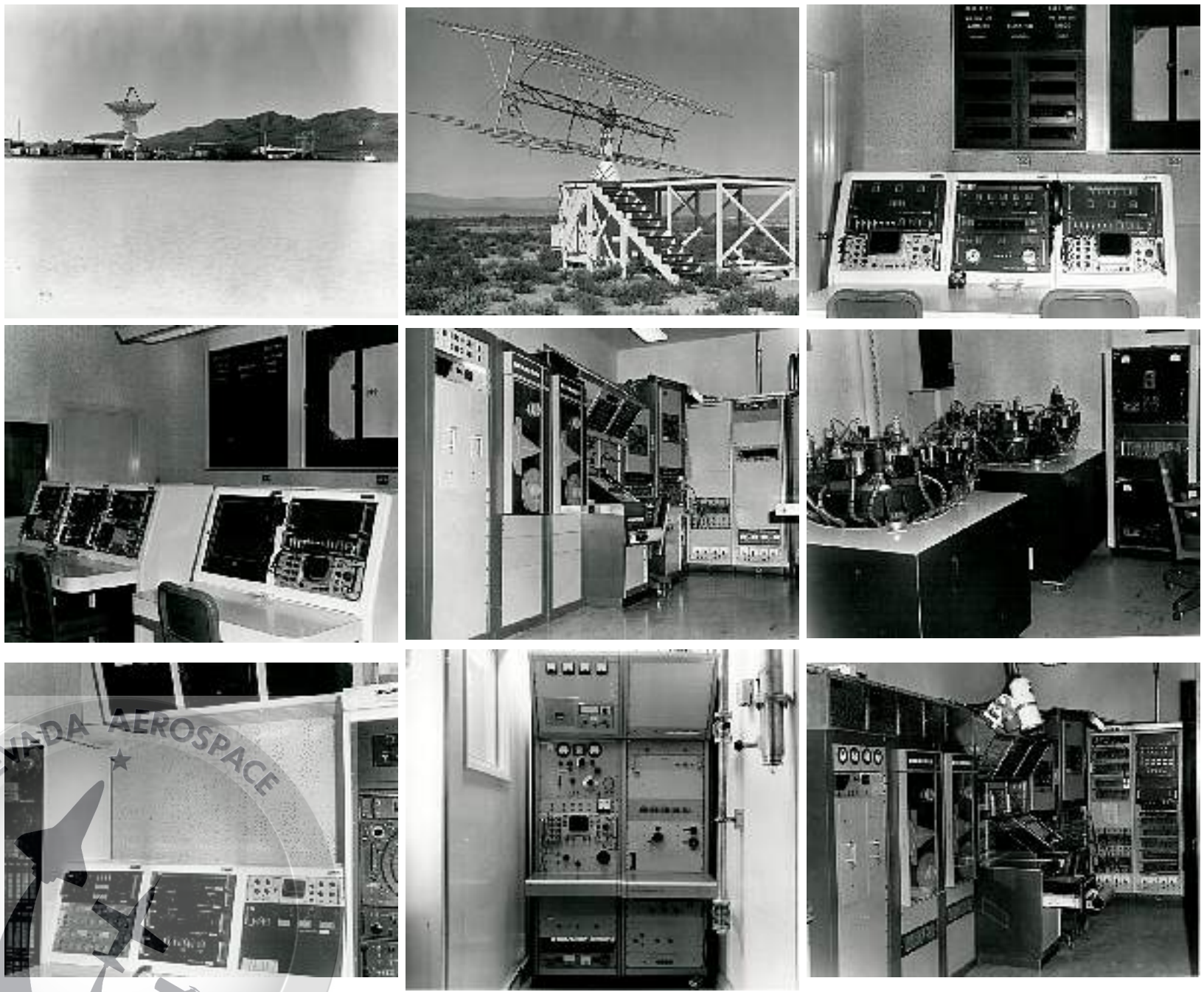


Beahm, Glen M.	Freedman, Ralph J.	Hunt, Lee D.	McGlothen, Willie	Vittetoe, Dennis E.
Becherer, Charles B.	Gamble, Sammie L.	Jenkins, Wesley G.	McLeod, William F.	Washam, Charley P.
Christensen, Calvin D	Grace, John W.	Kirchhoff, Robert T.	Owens, Elridge W.	Watson, Galen E.
Dawson, Cowan F.	Haen, David B.	Leonardi, John	Starry, Clifford E.	

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Photos donated by Ralph "Jim" Freedman
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There were two things that those of us working at Area 51 in the 1960s will never forget.

1. The excellent food served at the mess hall.
2. The various types of planes we flew in to and from Groom Lake.



Groomlake in 1959



T.D. Barnes at EG&G reunion at atomic museum - 2006