

PROJECT SKYLARK



In early 1964, the Soviet Union had secretly moved missiles and rockets onto the island of Cuba, a mere 90 miles from the mainland of the United States, prompting the CIA to begin planning for the contingency of flights over that island under a program designated SKYLARK. Oxcart pilot Bill Park's A-12 accident at Groom Lake in early July held this program up for a time, but on 5 August Acting DCI Marshall S. Carter directed that SKYLARK achieve emergency operational readiness by 5 November. This involved preparing a small OXCART detachment to secretly initiate flights over Cuba.

The goal was to operate at Mach 2.8 and 80,000 feet altitude. In order to meet the deadline set by General Carter, camera performance would have to be validated, pilots qualified for Mach 2.8 flight, and coordination with supporting elements arranged.

Among the obstacles facing the planners, only one of several installations for electronic countermeasures (ECM) would be ready by November. This meant the missions would involve operating over Soviet and Cuba missile installations without a full complement of defensive systems. Addressing this problem was a senior intra-governmental group, including representation from the President's Scientific Advisory Committee. The panel decided that the first few overflights could safely be conducted without them, but having ECM capability would be necessary thereafter.

After considerable modifications to aircraft, the detachment simulated Cuban missions

