

This document is made available through the declassification efforts
and research of John Greenewald, Jr., creator of:

The Black Vault



The Black Vault is the largest online Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) document clearinghouse in the world. The research efforts here are responsible for the declassification of hundreds of thousands of pages released by the U.S. Government & Military.

Discover the Truth at: <http://www.theblackvault.com>



NATIONAL RECONNAISSANCE OFFICE

14675 Lee Road
Chantilly, VA 20151-1715

17 November 2014

Mr. John Greenewald, Jr.

[REDACTED]

Re: F15-0025

Dear Mr. Greenewald:

This is in response to your request dated 13 November 2014, received in the Information Management Services Office of the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO) on 13 November 2014. Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), you are requesting "a copy of 'The National Reconnaissance Office: A Brief History of its Creation and Evolution.'"

We have processed your request in accordance with the FOIA, 5 U.S.C. § 552, as amended. After a thorough search of our records and databases, we located one three page document that we believe is responsive to your request. This document has been previously released in full under the FOIA. It is being released in full to you, as well, in response to your request.

The FOIA authorizes federal agencies to assess fees for record services. Based upon the information provided, you have been placed in the "other" category of requesters, which means you are responsible for the cost of search time exceeding two hours (\$44.00/hour) and reproduction fees (.15 per page) exceeding 100 pages. In this case, no assessable fees were assessed in processing your request.

You have the right to appeal this determination by addressing your appeal to the NRO Appeal Authority, 14675 Lee Road, Chantilly, VA 20151-1715 within 60 days of the date of this letter. Should you decide to do so, please explain the basis of your appeal.

If you have any questions, please call the Requester Service Center at (703) 227-9326 and reference case number **F11-0025**.

Sincerely,

Patricia Cameresi
Patricia B. Cameresi
Chief, Information Review
and Release Group

Enclosure: The National Reconnaissance Office: A Brief History of its Creation and Evolution

Feature Article

The National Reconnaissance Office: A Brief History of its Creation and Evolution

by R. Cargill Hall
NRO Historian

Almost forty years ago, United States leaders created a hybrid National Reconnaissance Office (NRO) to meet the unusual intelligence demands of the nuclear age and the Cold War. The chain of events began when President Dwight D. Eisenhower and a few confidants undertook national and international initiatives between 1953 and 1961 intended to help preclude a surprise nuclear attack. Among them, they

approved for development remarkable overhead technical systems that could collect *reliable* intelligence about the military equipment and disposition of Soviet forces; in the process they opened the Soviet Union to American scrutiny. During this period they also established the national policy and organizations needed to guide and execute a newly-emergent enterprise: astronautics.

Eisenhower's strategic intelligence collection systems included high altitude balloons (Project GENETRIX), airplanes (Projects AQUATONE U-2 and OXCART A12/SR-71), and, moving above airspace into outer space, reconnaissance satellites. The United States Air Force had begun the latter effort independently and by 1956 had contracted with industry for its reconnaissance satellite program, first known as Weapon

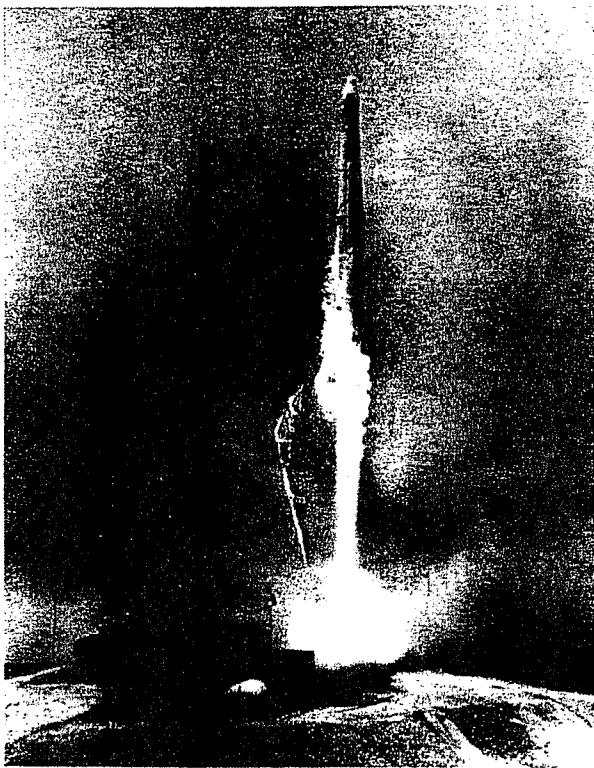


Richard M. Bissell, Jr., CIA Deputy Director (Plans), Director of Project CORONA, and temporarily Co-director of the NRO in late 1961, before resigning from the CIA in early 1962.



Joseph V. Charyk, Undersecretary of the Air Force and first Director of the National Reconnaissance Office, 1961-1963.

NRO Approved For Release



Early CORONA launch from Vandenberg AFB, California, 1960.



Robert S. McNamara, Secretary of Defense, who established the National Reconnaissance Program (NRP) and the National Reconnaissance Office to manage it on 6 September 1961.

System (WS) 117L. Although a classified program, after the launch of Sputnik I in October 1957 WS 117L (later renamed SAMOS) was widely and accurately reported by the media to be a reconnaissance vehicle. This distressed the President, who insisted on absolute secrecy in matters of intelligence. In early 1958 he ordered the film recovery element removed from SAMOS, (an element that appeared most promising for rapid development), and named a CIA-Air Force team to manage it—a team similar to the one that had managed the U-2. With that action he established a covert reconnaissance satellite program to become known as CORONA.

A year later in 1959, Eisenhower approved a second covert reconnaissance satellite program, eventually known as GRAB (Galactic Radiation and Background) experiment, designed to collect electronic intelligence (ELINT) from Soviet air defense radars. The Naval Research Laboratory managed GRAB for the Director of Naval Intelligence. Finally, in late August 1960, after the loss of a U-2 airplane inside the USSR provoked an international furor, Eisenhower removed the SAMOS program from Air Force military control and placed custody of it in a civilian-directed office in the Department of the Air Force—an office that reported directly to the Secretary of Defense.

The man selected to head the new Pentagon office and the Air Force reconnaissance satellite program was Air Force Undersecretary Joseph V. Charyk. A small contingent of military officers and contractors who ran the program now reported directly to him, bypassing entirely the Air Force chain of command—much to the dismay of some Air Force leaders. When in January 1961 John F. Kennedy succeeded Eisenhower as President, a newly-appointed Secretary of Defense, Robert S. McNamara, asked Charyk to remain as director of the Defense Department's reconnaissance office.

On 6 September, McNamara formally established the National Reconnaissance Program consisting of "all satellite and overflight

reconnaissance projects whether overt or covert," and he converted the civilian Air Force office into the National Reconnaissance Office to manage that program. An accompanying agreement with the CIA named as the NRO's joint directors Under Secretary of the Air Force Charyk, and the CIA's Deputy Director (Plans), Richard Bissell, who together had full authority to execute the effort. In the charter and interagency agreement, the CIA managed CORONA film recovery satellite program immediately transferred to the NRO—much to the dismay of some CIA leaders—while the Navy's GRAB satellite program required another agreement before it, too, moved to the NRO in May 1962. At that time Charyk was formally named sole Director of the NRO (DNRO).

In the years that followed, the NRO and its contractors designed, built, launched, and operated reconnaissance satellites. Together, the NRO's confederated Satellite Programs A (Air Force), B (CIA), and C (Navy) revolutionized strategic intelligence collection, made possible verifiable arms control treaties, and set the Cold War firmly on course to its denouement in 1989-1991. The NRO-funded low altitude weather satellite, the first operational system of its kind, in the 1970s became the Defense Meteorological Satellite Program (DMSP). In the mid 1970s the film-limited CORONA-type capsule recovery satellites were succeeded by near-real time electro-optical imaging satellites, limited now almost solely by auxiliary power.

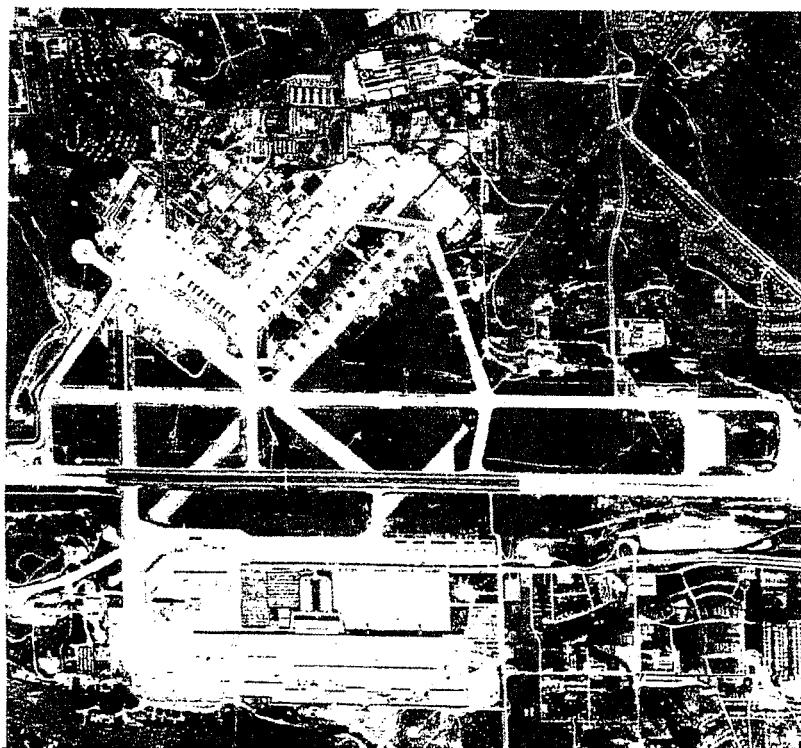
The GRAB Signals Intelligence satellites likewise led to successors far more technically-sophisticated and powerful. Contemplating these changes, Miles

Copeland, a retired intelligence officer, reflected: "a satellite circling the world...will pick up more information in a day than the espionage service could pick up in a year." Indeed, by the 1980s improved capabilities in space and on Earth opened the way to using overhead intelligence for tactical support of military forces. Though tested successfully in the 1991 Gulf War, it was found wanting in various respects; a system architecture designed to furnish national leaders strategic intelligence was not so easily adapted to support commanders in the field.

Subsequent actions and events in the 1990s marked a major change in the history of the NRO: The NRO headquarters staff at the Pentagon, together with NRO program elements located elsewhere in the country, moved to a new headquarters complex in

Chantilly, Virginia; the existence of the NRO was made known publicly and a number of early NRO space projects were declassified; new entities such as the National Imagery and Mapping Agency (NIMA) were created to improve intelligence support to warfighters; and the competitive NRO Programs A, B, and C were combined into a single team and organized functionally into directorates: Imaging, Signals Intelligence, Communications, Space Launch, and Advanced Systems and Technology.

While NRO personnel today strive to ensure for the United States global information superiority in the 21st century, they can take pride in an intelligence heritage second-to-none—whose lineage can be traced to a small civilian-directed office established in the Department of Defense nearly forty years ago, on 31 August 1960.



Carswell AFB, Texas, photographed by CORONA Mission 1006, on pass 78, 9 June 1964, from an altitude of 105 nm.