



Early U-2 in flight. (Photo credit: CIA)

## The Secret History of the U-2 — and Area 51

**US Spy Planes Targeted China to Help India; Used British Crews to "Confuse the Soviets" and Overfly French Nuclear Sites**

**Groom Lake/Area 51 Finally Declassified**

**Less Redacted CIA History Released Under FOIA**

National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 434

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### In The News

[Declassified: The CIA's Secret History of Area 51](#)  
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[Area 51 Info Released to George Washington University's National Security Archive](#)  
*CBS*, August 16, 2013

[Area 51? It exists! CIA finally acknowledges existence of secret testing ground](#)  
By Joe Tacopino, *NY Post*, August 16,

### Washington, D.C., August 15, 2013

– On 21 February 1955, Richard M. Bissell, a senior CIA official, wrote a check on an Agency account for \$1.25 million dollars and mailed it to the home of Kelly Johnson, chief engineer at the Lockheed Company's Burbank, California, plant. According to a newly declassified CIA history of the U-2 program obtained under the Freedom of Information Act by National Security Archive senior fellow Jeffrey T. Richelson, the Agency was about to sign a contract with Lockheed for \$22.5 million to build 20 U-2 aircraft, but the company needed a cash infusion right away to keep the work going. Through the use of "unvouchered" funds — virtually free from any external oversight or accounting — the CIA could write checks to finance secret programs, such as the U-2. As it turned out, Lockheed produced the 20 aircraft at a total of \$18,977,597 (including \$1.9 million in profit), or less than \$1 million per plane. It was all "under budget," a miracle in today's defense contracting world.



Photograph, taken during a 1957 U-2 flight, of a R-7 missile launch pad at the Tyuratam missile test center.

What the CIA released in response to a 2005 Freedom of Information Act request is a substantially less redacted version of a history of two key aerial reconnaissance programs. Written by agency historians Gregory Pedlow and Donald Welzenbach, and titled *The Central Intelligence Agency and Overhead Reconnaissance: The U-2 and OXCART Programs, 1954-1974*, the study was published in classified channels in 1992. Subsequently, a heavily redacted version of the U-2 portion was published,

**US Government Admits There IS An Area 51 (PICTURES)**

Huffington Post UK, August 16, 2013

**Declassified documents lift shroud over U-2, Area 51**

By STEVE TETREAUT AND KEITH ROGERS, LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL, August 15, 2013

**U.S. releases records confirming existence of Area 51**

WTOP, August 16, 2013

**CIA lifts the lid on Area 51 for the first time EVER: Agency acknowledges existence of test area at last as it releases new map and scores of documents on spy plane tests**

Daily Mail, August 15, 2013

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By Mark Memmott, MPR, August 16, 2013

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MSN Now, August 16, 2013

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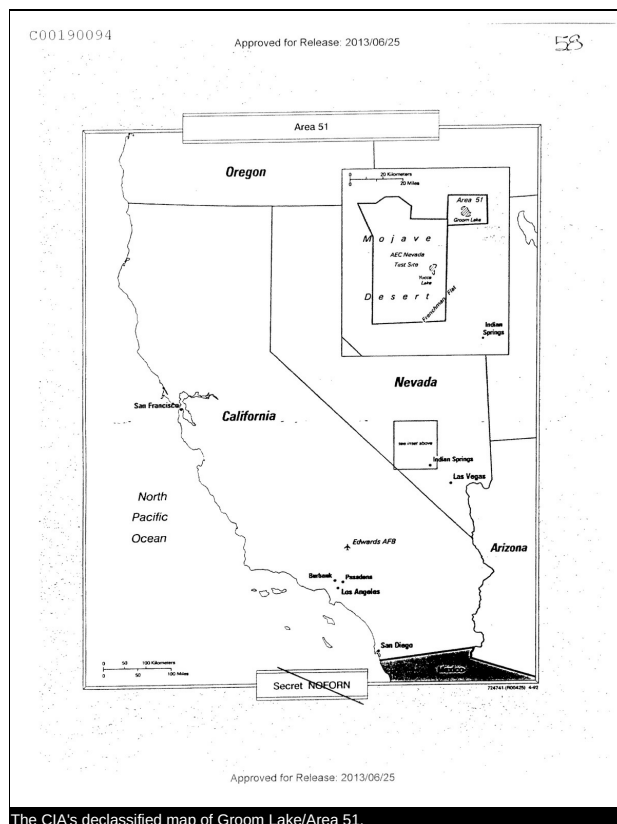
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in 1998, by the agency's Center for the Study of Intelligence as a book, *The CIA and the U-2 Program, 1954-1974*, in conjunction with a CIA conference on the U-2. The full study, in redacted form, had been released in response to FOIA requests.

The latest release is notable for the significant amount of newly declassified material with respect to the U-2 — with regard to names of pilots, codenames and cryptonyms, locations, funding and cover arrangements, electronic countermeasures equipment, organization, cooperation with foreign governments, and operations, particularly in Asia. In addition, the release also contains newly declassified on one manned and two unmanned aerial reconnaissance efforts. Specifically, newly declassified material on:

- Numerous references to Area 51 and Groom Lake, with a map of the area.
- Names of all the pilots who flew the U-2 missions that are discussed in the history
- A table (Appendix D) which provides key data on all U-2 flights over the Soviet Union — date, mission numbers, pilot, airfield, payload, and route. Maps show all the routes.
- Cryptonyms and codewords such as KWEXTRA-00, KWGLITTER-00, OARFISH, HTNAMABLE, KWCORK, MUDLARK (the project to gather all available information about the downing of Francis Gary Powers' U-2), and HBJARGON (the U-2 base in Pakistan).
- More than three pages (pp. 153-157, previously deleted in their entirety) on British participation in the U-2 program. The authors note that President Dwight Eisenhower viewed British participation "as a way to confuse the Soviets as to sponsorship of particular overflights" as well to spread the risk of failure.



The CIA's declassified map of Groom Lake/Area 51.

- An account (pp. 231-233, previously redacted in its entirety) of U-2 operations from India, between 1962 and 1967, triggered by the 1962 Sino-Indian war.
- An account (pp. 222-230 ff., almost entirely deleted in the previous release) of U.S.-sponsored Chinese Nationalist U-2 operations, including tables of the number of overflight and peripheral missions each year.
- Details of Operation FISH HAWK (pp. 249-251), the employment of a U-2, launched off an aircraft carrier in May 1964, to photograph the French nuclear test site in the Pacific.
- Discussions of a manned low-altitude reconnaissance program, STPOLLY, consisting of flights over China during the 1960s by Chinese Nationalist pilots.
- An account (pp. 211-216) of U-2 operations in support of CIA covert operations in support of the 1958 Indonesian rebellion and the Tibetan rebellion against China.
- Accounts (in Appendix E) of two unmanned aerial reconnaissance programs — AQUILINE and AXILLARY.

The many books and articles written on the aerial reconnaissance programs, particularly the U-2 and the OXCART (and its Air Force variant, the SR-71), include much information about these topics, often with significant accuracy.<sup>1</sup> However, the newly released material provides a combination of significant new material, official confirmation of — or corrections to — what has been written, and official acknowledgment that permits researchers to follow up the disclosures with FOIA or Mandatory Declassification Review requests that may produce even more information.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, like any historical study, the CIA history may include errors that will require further scrutiny by researchers in the field.



U-2 on landing strip. (Photo credit: CIA)

### **The Central Intelligence Agency and Overhead**

#### ▼ Commentary by British U-2 Historian Chris Pocock on the CIA History

British author Chris Pocock has been writing about U-2 history for years, beginning with *Dragon Lady: The History of the U-2 Spy Plane* (1989) and more recently *Fifty Years of the U-2* (2005). According to a previously excised comment in the CIA history, Pocock's book, *Dragon Lady*, is "by far the most accurate unclassified account of the U-2 program." Recognizing that any historical study has its limitations and needs to be approached critically, Mr. Pocock has closely scrutinized the CIA history and has kindly provided us with his detailed preliminary reactions on a page-by-page basis.

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*The Central Intelligence Agency and Overhead Reconnaissance: The U-2 and OXCART Programs 1954-1974* by Gregory W Pedlow and Donald E Welzenbach

Written 1992 (S/NOFORN). The U-2 portion declassified with reactions in 1998. FOIA request for a review of the redactions by the National Security Archive in 2005. Document review completed and approved for release 25 June 2013.

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***Reconnaissance: The U-2 and Oxcart Programs* ([torrent of full document](#)), by Gregory W. Pedlow and Donald E. Welzenbach (History Staff, Central Intelligence Agency, 1992)**

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[Chapter 4](#) : The Final Overflights of the Soviet Union, 1959-1960

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[Chapter 6](#) : The U-2's Intended Successor: Project OXCART, 1956-1968

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## NOTES

[1] For example, the preface to the history notes some of the literature about the two programs and observes that "After the present study of the Agency's overhead

reconnaissance projects was completed, a new book on the U-2 was published in the United Kingdom. Chris Pocock's *Dragon Lady: The History of the U-2 Spyplane* is by far the most accurate unclassified account of the U-2 program." The previous release had the words "by far the most accurate" redacted.

[2] For example, the STPOLLY program is the subject of a CIA history, *Low-Level Technical Reconnaissance over Mainland China (1955-1966)*, requests for which have been denied in their entirety.

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