



F-117 Ribbon Cutting - RDNF

Sat, 07 Dec 2019, 1020-1045

General David L. Goldfein

Air Force Chief of Staff

REMARKS

- **THANK YOU MADAME SECRETARY. OUR AIRMEN HAVE NO BETTER FRIEND THAN THEIR NEW SECRETARY AND IT IS AN HONOR TO SHARE THE STAGE WITH YOU.**
- **[HUMOR – TURNING TO AIRCRAFT] SO YOU KNOW YOU'RE GETTING OLD WHEN THEY START PUTTING THE PLANES YOU ACTUALLY FLEW ON PERMANENT DISPLAY IN MUSEUMS.**
- **EVERY PILOT THAT LEARNED TO FLY THE F-117 IS GIVEN A BANDIT NUMBER. THE FIRST PILOT WAS MAJOR AL WHITELEY ... HE WAS BANDIT 150.**
- **WE STARTED WITH NUMBER 150 BECAUSE WE DIDN'T WANT TO GIVE AWAY HOW MANY PILOTS WERE ACTUALLY IN THE PROGRAM.**

- **ONLY 558 PILOTS EVER FLEW THE F-117 OPERATIONALLY. TWO OTHERS ARE HERE TODAY WITH US ... [SCOTT STIMPERT](#), BANDIT 270 ... AND [RICK WRIGHT](#), BANDIT 352.**
- **AND AS [SECRETARY BARRETT](#) SAID, I WAS PRIVILEGED TO BE THE LAST BANDIT ... NUMBER 708.**
- **THE MOST FASCINATING PART OF FLYING THE BLACK JET ... AS WE CALLED HER ... WAS THE OPPORTUNITY TO MEET AND SPEND TIME WITH THE COMMUNITY OF FOLKS FROM SKUNK WORKS AND ACROSS THE GOVERNMENT WHO WORKED FOR YEARS SHROUDED IN SECRECY TO CREATE THE GAME CHANGING TECHNOLOGY OF STEALTH.**
- **I BELIEVE IT STANDS AS THE GREATEST SECRET OUR NATION HAS EVER KEPT.**
- **FOR 9 YEARS, PILOTS, MAINTAINERS, CONTRACTOR, AND SUPPORT PERSONNEL WOULD GATHER AT A SMALL AIRPORT IN NORTH LAS VEGAS EVERY SUNDAY AFTERNOON AND QUIETLY FLY NORTH TO TONOPAH AIRFIELD.**

- **FOR A WEEK, THEY WOULD LIVE LIKE BATS ... SLEEPING DURING THE DAY AND FLYING ALL NIGHT ... ONLY TO RETURN HOME TO THEIR FAMILIES ON FRIDAY NIGHT.**
- **RINSE ... WASH ... REPEAT ... FOR 9 YEARS.**
- **THE ENTIRE TIME, FAMILIES HAD NO IDEA WHAT MOM OR DAD DID OR WHERE THEY WERE. COVER STORIES BECAME THE NORM ... AND THEY HELD.**
- **EVERYONE WAS ISSUED TIE PINS WITH THE NIGHTHAWK SYMBOL. THE EYE OF THE BIRD WAS RED FOR PILOTS, GREY FOR OTHERS.**
- **WHEN THEY SAW EACH OTHER ON WEEKENDS IN VEGAS, THEY WOULD ACKNOWLEDGE WITH A SLIGHT HEADNOD AND THEN QUICKLY SEPARATE SO NOBODY COULD PUT TWO AND TWO TOGETHER ... OR POSSIBLY SAY SOMETHING THAT MIGHT COMPROMISE THE STORY.**

- IT IS THE ONLY TOP SECRET PROGRAM I KNOW THAT HAD ANOTHER TOP SECRET COVER STORY NOW ACKNOWLEDGED OF SOVIET MIGS IN OUR INVENTORY ALSO FLYING IN NORTHERN NEVADA. ASK **HAWK CARLISLE** ABOUT THAT PROGRAM WHEN YOU SEE HIM.
- MOST THOUGHT THE SECRET WOULD LAST MAYBE 2-3 YEARS TOPS. WHO KNEW WE WOULD MAINTAIN ITS “MANHATTAN PROJECT” LEVEL OF SECRECY FOR ALMOST A DECADE.
- THE GREATEST SECRET WE HAVE EVER KEPT.
- I’VE ALSO FOUND INSPIRATION IN HOW THE BLACK JET CAME TO BE ... AND WHAT IT MEANS TO ALL OF US TODAY AS WE CONTINUE TO BRING GAME CHANGING TECHNOLOGY TO THE BATTLEFIELD.
- THE STORY BEGINS JUST THIRTY MILES AWAY IN BURBANK, CALIFORNIA.

- **DENNIS OBERHOLZER ... A YOUNG SKUNK WORKS ENGINEER ... HIS IDEA OF A GOOD TIME ON WEEKENDS WAS READING JOURNALS ... NOT JUST ANY JOURNAL, BUT TECHNICAL JOURNALS TRANSLATED FROM OTHER LANGUAGES.**
- **SO HE'S READING THIS RUSSIAN JOURNAL AND HE FINDS A MATH EQUATION FOR WHAT WE NOW CALL STEALTH.**
- **AND HE WALKS INTO **BEN RICH** ... THEN THE CEO AT SKUNK WORKS ... AND HE PUTS A MODEL, A WOODEN CARVING, OF WHAT RESEMBLES A HOPE DIAMOND ... ON HIS DESK.**
- ****BEN** LOOKS UP AND SAYS, "WHAT'S THAT?"**
- ****DENNIS** SAYS, "WELL ... THIS WILL RETURN THE RADAR CROSS SECTION OF AN EAGLE'S EYE."**
- ****BEN RICH** RESPONDED ... "WELL, YOU MEAN AN EAGLE?"**
- ****DENNIS** SAYS ... "NO, AN EAGLE'S EYE."**
- **AND THEN, AS CAPTURED IN THE FAMOUS BOOK SKUNK WORKS, **BEN** ASKED, "WELL, CAN YOU GET IT AIRBORNE?"**

- HOW HARD COULD IT BE?
- SO THEY STARTED WORKING ON IT ... AND **BEN RICH** CAME TO THE PENTAGON ... AND SPOKE TO THE CHIEF STAFF OF THE AIR FORCE AND THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE.
- HE PULLS A MARBLE OUT OF HIS POCKET AND ROLLS IT ACROSS THE TABLE ... AND THE SECRETARY ASKED “WHAT’S THAT?”
- **BEN RICH** SAYS “THAT’S THE RADAR CROSS SECTION OF WHAT I’M ABOUT TO BUILD YOU.”
- AND THE REST, OF COURSE, IS HISTORY.
- IF IT WEREN’T FOR THE INTELLECTUAL CURIOSITY OF **DENNIS OVERHOLZER** ... OR THE DETERMINATION OF **BEN RICH** ... OR THE WILLINGNESS OF A SECRETARY OF DEFENSE AND A CHIEF OF STAFF TO MAKE A BET ... OUR NATION MIGHT NOT HAVE HAD THE CRITICAL CAPABILITIES THAT SERVED OUR NATION FOR SO MANY YEARS.

- **SO IT'S AN HONOR TO BE HERE WITH YOU TO SHARE THIS MOMENT AS WE ESTABLISH THIS REMARKABLE AIRCRAFT ... THE FIRST OPERATIONAL STEALTH FIGHTER ... IN IT'S RIGHTFUL PLACE IN HISTORY HERE AT PRESIDENT REAGAN'S LIBRARY.**
- **THE F117 STORY IS ONE FOR ALL OF US TO REMEMBER.**
- **JUST AS THEY DID, WE MUST BE PREPARED TO WORK SIDE BY SIDE WITH INDUSTRY TO TAKE CHANCES AND PLACE BETS ON THE TECHNOLOGY THAT ENSURES WE WIN.**
- **WHAT A FITTING TRIBUTE TO AUDACITY, PURE GUTS, AND VISION THAT SHOULD INSPIRE EVERYONE WHO SEES THIS DISPLAY FOR YEARS TO COME.**
- **AND FOR US ... LET THE MARBLES ROLL.**
- **THANK YOU.**