

# AIR FORCE, CIA CELEBRATE U-2 SPY PLANE HISTORY

## BUT PROBLEMS LOOM

By David Atkinson

Service and industry leaders gathered yesterday to celebrate the storied career of the U-2 spyplane, but there are signs that the famous "Dragon Lady" and its pilots are facing a potentially serious readiness problem. The U-2, built by Lockheed Martin [LMT], is the nation's primary manned reconnaissance and surveillance platform. Entering service in the 1950s, the plane has provided U.S. leadership with valuable intelligence for over 40 years, and will continue to do so, according to Air Force Maj. Gen. John Casciano, director of Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance for the DoD.

"The U-2 provided 50 percent of all imagery to Gen. Schwarzkopf during Operation Desert Storm and 90 percent of [ground forces] targeting info," Casciano said. "[The U-2] will continue to serve as the backbone of the Air Force's aerial reconnaissance force for a long time, even if it doesn't have a fuel gauge and is the last tail-dragger in the inventory."

Jack Gordon, head of Lockheed Martin's famous Skunk Works, said that a current re-engining program which is putting General Electric [GE] F118-100 engines in all 35 of the U-2s in service will extend the service life of the U-2 past 2020. "The U-2 fleet's 35 airframes are all relatively young," Casciano said. "The ones we have in service now were all part of the last deliveries in the late 1970s and early 80s under the TR-1 program. These planes average less than 5,000 hours on the airframes. The oldest airframes in service show no significant degradation after more than 20,000 hours."

The remarks came at a symposium in Washington, D.C., honoring the 44-year history of the U-2 sponsored by the Central Intelligence Agency. But Casciano also said that the 9th Reconnaissance Wing at Beale AFB, Calif., leads the Air Force in operational tempo. High operational tempo is a major concern throughout the Air Force, which is seeing its pilots and maintenance personnel leave because of overwork and a lucrative civilian job market.

But the small size and critical capability of the U-2 community means that the 9th has recently seen a "hemorrhage" of pilots leaving that it cannot replace. An official with the 9th Wing told Defense Daily that the unit saw 20 pilots leave the service in the last year, and only brought in 12 to replace them. The pilots of the 9th are averaging 156 days on temporary duty--flying assignments that take them away from family and their regular duty--per year.

The problem is exacerbated, the source said, by the fact that Initial Qualification and Mission Qualification training can take up to seven months, because the plane operates in a very narrow "coffin corner" envelope. Another bottleneck is that the unit's U-2T two-seat trainer aircraft suffers from low readiness rates. In general, he said, only one two-seater is available at any given time for training.

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