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Author: Glenn Campbell

It looks like we're fighting another Cold War here in casino land. The scenario is familiar: On one side of the wall are the motley defenders of freedom and democracy, championing human rights and strict limitations on government; on the other lurk the dark and impenetrable forces of the totalitarian police state where high ideals are publicly proclaimed but decisions are really controlled by the lowest denominators of human nature.

That's right, it's us versus the U.S. Air Force.

Okay, guys, I know there's a base at Groom Lake. You know there's a base at Groom Lake. Just about everyone who doesn't have a security clearance is talking about. So why can't the military acknowledge what the world knows already? National security isn't an issue here. We could debate for hours the merits of keeping secret weapons secret, but what's the sense in maintaining a charade of non-existence for a place that's already been publicized all over the world?

One possible explanation has just hit the Las Vegas newspapers. Now, class, I want you take out your Russian satellite photo of the secret Groom Lake base. (Everybody's got one. It came with the new Testor's Aurora and Mothership models.) Look at the main cluster of buildings. To the southwest of that are some diagonal scratch marks on the ground, roughly parallel to the main runway.

It's a hazardous waste dump!

According to an Oct. 19 article in the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, a widow has tried to sue Lockheed over the death of her husband. Seems that in the 1980s, the clever denizens of this Black Nirvana used a trench-and-burn method for disposing of hazardous dioxins used in the manufacture of Stealth aircraft. It's an old recipe, forgotten in the civilized world: Dig a trench, dump in your hazardous wastes, burn the wastes, then bulldoze it over. It ain't Kosher, but no one has to know: A base that doesn't exist doesn't have to follow the rules. The widow's husband was a construction worker during the boom Reagan years, working on the roofs of buildings downwind of where the dioxins were allegedly burned. She claimed his death was a direct result of exposure to the smoke.

"Air Force Promises Openness" a subsequent headline reported, even as the Air Force was taking steps to shut down the fabled "Bleachers"--the hilltop viewpoints into Groom. Can a leopard change its spots? "Air Force Openness" has the same sort of ironic ring as "Military Intelligence" or "Public Relations Officer." The purpose of the latter, of course, is not to relate to the public at all, but merely to issue various forms of "no comment" and read from a written script the official responses to a handful of acceptable questions. According to the official script, the full and only public explanation given for seizing the viewpoints is "to ensure the public safety and the safe and secure operation of activities in the Nellis Range Complex." It may only be coincidence that the Bleachers also look down on the non-existent hazardous waste site. Maybe that's the public safety angle. Are the Bleachers downwind of the dioxin pits, or merely too close for the military's comfort?

If the Bleachers remain open, the military will eventually have to answer for its past sins. Whether these include illegal hazardous waste dumps or merely untold billions squandered on fruitless projects, the military would rather not have outsiders rummaging around in its closet. Their hope seems to be that if they pull a blind over the window and continue to pretend there's nothing there, then the public will forget about this place and all the pressures for more openness will go away. Groom Lake may be the home of the rumored Aurora spyplane. Even more disturbing, however, is the suggestion that Groom might *not* be the home of the rumored Aurora spy plane. Maybe, as the Air Force insists, the plane doesn't exist at all, in which case a lot of the taxpayer's money has been squandered with no results. Budget analysis by the Federation of American Scientists suggests that at least \$10 billion was spent on something very black, and if no product worthy of that cost was actually produced, some heads ought to roll.

The trouble with excessive secrecy is that in addition to protecting what may be legitimate technological secrets, it also hides the blunders, poor performance and criminal acts of the people doing the censoring. The alleged dioxin dumps are just the sort of crude violation we would expect when a single-minded government agency is allowed to operate without oversight. When an organization is obsessed with the single sacred crusade--in this case, saving the free world from an Evil Empire--it is easy for them to forget about social niceties like environmental regulations, budgetary accountability and the human rights of workers.

In our Brave New World, the Air Force is going to have to learn how to explain things to its constituents, not stonewall on every question, and now is the time for that lesson to hit home.

## **FUN WITH SENSORS**

Here's a challenge to you radio buffs: Find the sensors planted on public land around the perimeter of the top secret Groom Lake base. The most common kind are magnetic anomaly detectors planted beside dirt roads to detect passing cars. If you happen to drive past one of these, you can be certain that the anonymous, camouflage-clad dudes in the white Jeep Cherokees will be along in a few minutes to shadow you, even if you go nowhere near the border.

The sensor apparatus consists of two detection units--plastic canisters about the size of soft drink cans buried beside the road. Inside each are some primitive electronics and a coil, which senses any big hunk of metal passing nearby. The two detection units are wired to a transmitter hidden in bushes about twenty feet away. The transmitter is about the size of a gallon paint can and takes its power from some batteries contained in a nearby ammo can. Given the vastness of the desert here, finding these devices seems almost impossible at first, and it took us many months to locate even one. Most of the dirt roads approaching the Restricted Zone are miles long, and the sensors could be anywhere. You can't home in on them with a radio even if you know the frequency, because they transmit only a single brief pulse when they detect something--not enough to deduce the location from afar. The solution? We cruise the roads with a frequency counter, set on its fastest gate time. When 496.25 MHz comes onto the display, we know we just passed one of those top secret sensors. We get out, comb the sides of the road and sure enough, there's another transmitter hiding in the bushes. We have now found a dozen of these sensors in logical places, usually many miles from the border, and we have made a map of where they are. Now, when we want to preserve our privacy on public land, we temporarily unscrew the antenna from the transmitter before driving by. We are then very careful to replace the antenna after passing so as not to be accused of damaging government property.

We never cease to be amazed at how the apparatus of secrecy can be turned into a spotlight on its makers. The transmitted pulse is available for anyone to pick up, so we are working now on ways to monitor the sensors ourselves. We'll use them to keep track of the cammo dudes in the white Jeep Cherokees.

Alas, we may not get the chance to implement this particular plan. We gave a copy of our map to local officials of BLM, the custodian of public lands. BLM is not happy. The Air Force has no jurisdiction on public land and is supposed to apply to BLM before it does this sort of thing. Bad Air Force. If you want the challenge of finding these sensors for yourself you better come soon, because we predict they won't remain in place for very long.

It's like the remote TV camera on a tripod that we once found on public land. We had a picnic beside it, made faces into it from six inches away and scribbled our names on the legs. Sure enough, within days, the camera vanished and reappeared on the other side of the border where it belongs.

Someone's has to keep an eye on Big Brother!

## **GROOM PATCH IS HERE**

The [Groom Dry Lake Test Facility patch](#) is now available. It's the first of its kind to commemorate this nonexistent base, and we expect it to be a hot seller among the workers inside. We are also an authorized dealer for the new Testor's XR-7 and SR-75 models. See ad in this issue. Proceeds fund our continued secrecy oversight research. We are also open to new patch designs and product ideas, with a modest royalty paid to the designer. Send ideas and comments to: Glenn

Campbell, HCR Box 38, Rachel, NV 89001. Internet: [campbell@ufomind.com](mailto:campbell@ufomind.com).