

ACTUAL VERBAL TRANSCRIPT
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This 60 Minutes segment originally aired on March 17, 1996. It follows the controversy at a top secret air base which supposedly doesn't exist. For more information regarding the lawsuit and / or Area 51, point your web browser at:
<http://www.cris.com/~psyspy/area51/>

Leslie Stahl: Why this story is called Area 51 / Catch 22 will become clear as it unfolds. But let's start at the beginning... What if we told you that someone is dumping truck loads of toxic waste in open trenches, and setting it on fire, endangering the health and lives of everyone down wind? You'd probably want the government to prosecute. After all, it is a federal crime, punishable by up to 15 years in prison, and a one million dollar fine. But what if we then told you that the perpetrator, the one who is doing the open pit burning, is the government. In this case, the United States Department of Defense. Well that's exactly what dozens of government whistle blowers are charging. The problem is, they can't prove it. Because it took place at a top, top secret air force base, that officially, doesn't exist.

Stahl: Las Vegas, McKaren Airport. Every morning, civilian contractors, test pilots, and others, board unmarked planes with whited out windows. They are flying to an air force installation that has never appeared on federal aviation pilot charts, or U.S. geological survey maps. It exists only in what is called the "black world". A place so sensitive, that only those who take an oath of secrecy for life are allowed in.

Stahl: The perimeter of the base is blanketed with ground sensors and listening devices, and patrolled by security guards in unmarked white jeeps who are authorized to use deadly force to keep intruders out. They kept a close watch on us as we approached the border. This is as close as you can get to the base, which is thirteen miles back off (points behind her) in this direction. It's known as Area 51, Groom Lake, Dreamland, any one of a dozen names depending on who you ask. But just don't ask anyone at the defense department. They don't want to talk about it.

Stahl: But Jonathan Turley is only too happy to talk about it. He's a law professor representing Area 51 employees, past and present, who say they not only witnessed dumping of toxic waste at the base, but in many cases participated in it. Turley is suing the government on their behalf, trying to get the defense department to acknowledge the burning, and to get a federal court order barring it from happening again. He isn't asking for punitive damages, all he wants is information about what toxins his clients were exposed to, and help paying their medical bills.

Stahl: But he's been about as successful as we were in getting the defense department to say anything about the base, seen here by a nearby mountaintop, even that it exists.

Jonathan Turley: Oh, they would not confirm it's existence or it's non existence.

Stahl: They wouldn't say it wasn't there. They wouldn't say that it was there?

Turley: Right. The only problem of course is that you can see the damn base from public land. You can take a picture of it. This is in the middle of the desert!. It's a large facility. It's about as concealable as a pig in the parlor.

Stahl: And about as secret. UFO groupies from around the world, convinced that the air force is hiding flying saucers there, trek to the perimeter of the base by the busload. There is an Area 51 research center, an Area 51 viewers guide, and in downtown Las Vegas, the base that doesn't exist has a bar and a video game named after it.

Turley: We finally said listen, if you are going to deny the obvious, then we are going to prove the obvious. Then I took a series of pictures and submitted those in evidence. I submitted affidavits of people who worked there, which said they were real people and this is a real base. I even had satellites from Russian and French satellites take pictures of the base

Stahl: The Russians have satellite pictures of this base?

Turley: Not only do they have satellite pictures, under treaty, the Russians are required to be flown over this base. It's called..

Stahl: Required?? Required to be flown over this base???

Turley: Yeah, it's called the Open Skies Treaty. The United States Government must fly the Russians, upon the demand of the Russians, and other countries over this facility. And they have to do the same at their bases.

Stahl: And they still deny it existed?

Turley: Yeah!

Stahl: "They" meaning the Pentagon?

Turley: Right..You sorta sit there and ya think, ya know.. this is like an out take of Maxwell Smart.. (laughs) These guys are gonna grab a phone or something..

Stahl: After nine months of hand to hand litigation, over whether or not the base exists, Air Force attorneys in November of 1994 finally confirmed the obvious. That yes it does exist. But then they dug in on a new front. This one, over whether or not the base has a name.

Turley: Well the name was important because we have a lot of documents that show that they had hazardous waste here. We've got testimony and affidavits.

Stahl: You needed to link the name with what you have in your documents..

Turley: Yes, and by denying Area 51, which was the common name, they made, or at least they tried to make all those documents irrelevant.

Stahl: But if the base has no name, as the Air Force insists, then how does the Pentagon explain this old film produced by Lockheed Skunk Works, the legendary defense contractor that flight tested the U2 spy plane, and the F117 stealth fighter among others, at Area 51? If you look closely, you can see this man write "move out to Area 51". And how do we know that those planes were flight tested at the base? We asked Jay Miller, the man Lockheed Skunk Works hired to write the company's official history.

Jay Miller: Once the manuscript was completed, one of the things that the Department of Defense asked me to do is remove the words Area 51, Groom Lake, Dreamland, The Ranch, ..those are all names that have been utilized for this one particular facility.. and uh.. to refer to it as the "test location".

Stahl: So they didn't mind that you described it, but they did mind that you named it. Explain that??

Miller: I have no answer for ya, I wish I did.

Stahl: The Air Force also refuses to answer any and all questions about the dumping of hazardous waste at Area 51, which as we said is why the workers are suing. Workers like John Doe #1, who is pressing the case anonymously, since anything he says about the base would violate his oath of secrecy, a crime punishable by up to ten years in prison.

John Doe #1: (producers altered his voice to mask his identity) You could not tell anyone that you even worked there. The acknowledgment of the operating location is strictly forbidden.

Stahl: He and other Area 51 employees say security is so complete that nothing except the workers ever leaves the base, not even garbage. It is either burned or buried right there, everything from food scraps, to jeeps, to jet parts. And those drums of toxic chemicals and wastes used in classified programs.

Stahl: This former Area 51 worker says the open pit burning was executed with extraordinary security.

JD#1: There was armed guards which would stop us approximately 100 yards or even more near the dump area.

Stahl: There were armed guards?

JD#1: Yes..

Stahl: Come on.. Armed with what?

JD#1: Rifles, side arms..

Stahl: You are talking about something thatís in the middle of a totally secure, secret air base, and in the middle of this, there are armed guards?

JD#1: Yes maíam..

Stahl: The burning he says, lasted for hours, and generated plumes of toxic smoke that swept over the base like London fog.

JD#1: Your eyes would water, sting, your throat would go dry, and uh, you felt like you were drug through a pig pen, so to speak.

Stahl: Do you think that you were exposed to something that was harmful to your health?

JD#1: Yes. Definitely, yes.

Stahl: And why do you say that?

JD#1: Skin irritation. ..wonít go away. Thereís no cure for it that I can find.

Stahl: What do you mean by skin irritation? Is it a rash?

JD#1: Cracking, bleeding. Itís gets pretty scaley.

Turley: Not surprisingly, people that were downwind from this operation became ill. And two of them have died.

Stahl: Youíre absolutely sure they died from the wastes that went up in this open pit?

Turley: No, Iím not absolutely sure. What Iím trying to find out is whether they did die because of this.

Stahl: One of those that did die, Robert Frost, also had cracking scaley skin, which can be caused by exposure to cancer causing chemicals like dioxin. This anaylsis by a Rutgers University biochemist found substantial quantities of dioxins in Robert Frostís fatty tissue. He also found other toxic chemical compounds he couldnít recall having ever seen in human tissues.

Stahl: Instead of responding to the specific charges, the defense department asked the court to dismiss the lawsuit, arguing that neither the government nor the workers can make their case without divulging top secret information.

Turley: I donít care if theyíve got Jimmy Hoffa buried in those trenches. What I care about is whether they burned hazardous waste and exposed my clients to the burning of those hazardous wastes. We can handle that without getting into sensitive areas.

Stahl: The Air Force maintains that if they answer your question, then the enemy will be able to piece together a mosaic about the specific operations at Area 51.

Turley: Yes, and thatís just facially absurd.

Stahl: Didnít you ever ask them any specifics?

Turley: Yes.

Stahl: Like what?

Turley: Oh, we asked if they have jet fuel there.

Stahl: Jet fuel.. What did they say?

Turley: They said to "admit or deny the presence of jet fuel at an air base would put American lives in danger."

Stahl: They said that?

Turley: Oh yeah..

Stahl: Címon.. What else did you ask?

Turley: We asked about paint.

Stahl: What ? (laughs)

Turley: Not the magic paint, not the stuff that makes planes disappear..
Paint.. Like in your house.

Stahl: What was the answer?

Turley: "American lives would be put in danger if we answer that question."

Stahl: No...

Turley: Yeah...

Stahl: What else did you ask?

Turley: Pesticides.

Stahl: Answer?

Turley: "Oh well.. Thatís a national security question." We asked what about if they have a single discarded car battery.?

Stahl: You actually asked that?

Turley: Yeah..

Stahl: What was there response.

Turley: "This is a top secret question that we could never answer."

Stahl: If itís so top secret, how come this manual distributed to Area 51 employees, identifies a gas station, a paint storage building, and yes, even a motor pool battery shop all on the base. The manual is available on the Internet. It was for years, unclassified, and widely distributed in the public domain. But when Turley introduced it into evidence, the defense department suddenly classified it, and everything in Turleyís office that quotes from it including notes and legal briefs.

Stahl: Congressman Lee Hamilton, former chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, has been following the Area 51 lawsuit.

Lee Hamilton: The Air Force is classifying all information about Area 51 in order to protect themselves from a lawsuit.

Stahl: The Air Force says, quote, "to reveal this information increases the risk to the lives of United States personnel, and decreases the probability of successful mission accomplishment." I mean, thatís very strong..

Hamilton: Itís very strong and itís completely unsubstantiated. Iím not personally prepared to take the word of a person who has, or an entity which has a huge financial stake in the outcome here, that this information needs to be classified.

Stahl: There in court, a judge agreed with that, and has said yes, that they can keep these things secret.

Hamilton: I think that judges are often snowed by the national security establishment.

Stahl: Because of the lawsuit, the Environmental Protection Agency inspected Area 51 last year for the first time, and prepared a hazardous waste inventory. They did a hazardous waste inventory, but they wonít admit there is hazardous waste there. But it gets better because they stated in court that they would put this facility on the hazardous waste docket.. Itís a list of federal facilities with hazardous waste. And they said, "weíre gonna put it on that list." And I said, "Well, Hello!", "doesnít that mean you have hazardous waste??!!" [Their response] well, not necessarily...

Stahl: Turley asked to see the hazardous waste inventory, since the law requires that it be disclosed to the public, unless that is, the President of the United States personally exempts it. You guessed it.. The Air Force asked President Clinton for the exemption, and got it.

Turley: There are very comical aspects to this case. The government is so absurd. And even in my office, we sit there and sort of guffaw they

are claiming these things are secret. But at the end of the day, I've got two dead clients, I've got other people who are ill, and I've got defendants who committed crimes. They know they committed crimes. So do I. And so does the court. And the question is, whether they are going to be held accountable? Because ultimately, that is what this case is about. Whether there is something unique about the United States Government that either makes it accountable or exempt from its own laws.

Stahl: On March 6, 1996, the Federal judge overseeing the lawsuit dismissed it, ruling that pursuing the case risked "significant harm to national security". Turley is appealing.