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FWD: (TLC-Mission) A-12, the summer of "67"

Date: Thu, 26 Aug 1999 22:57:50 -0700
From: "Terry W. Colvin"
Subject: FWD: (TLC-Mission) A-12, the summer of "67"

A lot of the A-12 (Oxcart) project revolved around the testing of SR-71/YF-12A/D-21 drone projects. The majority of tests were done at Area 51, Nevada, as the A-12 were kept there. They belonged to the CIA, not the Air Force. The YF-12A interceptor version was made somewhat visible to the public, so if an aircraft was spotted somewhere you would automatically assume it was a YF-12A. One must understand the flying of spyplanes, by the Air Force, was revoked after the Powers incident in 1960. The Air Force did not resume operational missions until the SR-71 deployment.

The government states the first operational mission of a SR-71 was flown from Kadena AB, Okinawa on May 31, 1967. Filming the Chinese detonating their first atomic bomb was also done at around this time, by a SR-71 our government states. Actually the aircraft used for these missions were the A-12. The government doesn't officially admit this, even today.

During May 1967 A-12's 60-6930, 60-6932, and 60-6937 were deployed to Det. 1 Kadena AB. They were pawned off to the layman as SR-71. These aircraft had no visible markings except a small red tail number painted on them. Missing was the rear cockpit that ALL SR-71 have.

I deployed with the 2nd group of TDY personnel from Beale AFB, to Kadena AB

in July of 1967. Our initial deployment to support the CIA were 10 KC-135Q tankers. The tankers were sent to Kadena in April 1967, prior to the A-12 movement. The KC-135Q received special modifications in the early 60's to refuel the A-12, and later the SR-71 and U-2. There were originally 21 of these aircraft at Beale. In the late 60's the Air Force modified more aircraft, drawn from Littlerock and Mc Coy AFB's to bring the total to 46.

The TDY to Kadena was an interesting affair. Actually it was a royal pain the butt! As this was a brand new detachment, there basically were no facilities for us. The A-12's were in 3 little hangers right in the middle of SAC's "Young Tiger Task Force" on the north side of the base. The only thing interesting in the area was the Special Forces museum on the road into the place. We had a small room for the classified equipment, such as the ARC-50 UHF radio system and the Rendezvous TACAN, but everything else would have to be worked out of the "Tiger" facilities. Somebody had decided that since we were adding an additional 10 tankers to the ramp we would be attached to the "Tiger" outfit. Their immediate interpretation of this no brainer was we worked for them first, and ourselves second. No one, with any authority from our group did anything to help the situation either. We were stuck!

The "Tiger" outfit couldn't work on our aircraft, as they weren't cleared for access. We performed all maintenance on our own aircraft. We were housed in their barracks and worked their schedule, in addition to whatever our mission requirement was. All this led to some rather heated arguments. After an initial crossing of swords right out of the gate with the AEMS Squadron C.O., (a real winner, as I recall) I immediately volunteered for the night shift. At least I wouldn't have to burn that bridge anymore. We had a T-Sgt with us who hid out in the classified equipment room for the 75 days we were there. I still don't know how he got away with that trick.

The night radio shop NCOIC and I got along great! As nobody liked to ride the truck for the nightly "Tiger" launch, I was automatically elected. I didn't mind this because it killed a lot of time, sometimes twice a night, except the go_da__ mosquitoes ate you up. All the JP-4 in the air must have sent them into a feeding frenzy. 50 or 60 tankers all in a line, idling away, going thru their preflight checklist, and then launch one right after another (about 45 seconds apart). The noise was deafening even with earplugs in, and headset on. That's OK, you couldn't sleep at the barracks on your night off either, for the prevailing breeze blew all of the noise in that general direction anyway! If you have never had the opportunity to hear a J-57 with water injection, you have truly not experienced life!

The A-12 missions would generate an 18 hour day for us, separate from the "Tiger" one. These missions did take precedence!!! The A-12 would fly north to south, down all of Vietnam, and then refuel at or over U-Tapao. It would then fly the same route south to north, for comparison photos, and return to Kadena. What made the day so long was having to launch tankers at different intervals, so they would arrive at the correct location on time, throughout the mission. Other missions were flown over North Korea, China and during the capture of the U.S.S. Pueblo.

The down time for maintenance on the A-12 (or SR-71) was extensive due to the nature of the aircraft. The Chine bay covers all had to be removed for access to the equipment, and these were not secured with dzuz fasteners. We were required to remove, bench test and align, and then reinstall all equipment. I felt extremely sorry for the instrument shop, as they were required to remove and calibrate every one after each flight.

On March 8, 1968 Maj. Buddy Brown (pilot) and Maj. Dave Jenson (RSO) arrived at Kadena in the first SR-71 (Senior Crown) from Beale, aircraft 64-17978. Later that month two more arrived from Beale. As was previously discussed on the Mission list, one A-12 was lost on June 2, 1968. The other two were ferried back to Area 51 later in the month, and then transferred to Palmdale, CA for storage. Kadena was the last operation in which the A-12 performed as a spyplane. All operations thereafter were accomplished by the SR-71, period.

The deployment of the SR-71 also ended personnel being attached to the "Tiger" outfit. Buildings had either been erected or procured by that time, and separate quarters mysteriously appeared for the troops. Additional tankers were stationed at Ching Chuan Kang AB in Taiwan, and U-Tapao AB in Thailand. This was to shorten the flight time to the mission area.

There are a number of examples of these two aircraft on display across the country. I strongly recommend if you have never seen one of these aircraft close-up, go to see one sometime; as this is the GREATEST jet plane to date.

A contact of mine from Beale has informed me, within the past year, that the present administration is attempting to have the backs broken, on all remaining aircraft, so they will never be able to fly again. There are some of both types in cold storage at Palmdale and Edwards AFB available for use

again, if the occasion presents itself. I can only guess what the real motive, for such a drastic move must be!

I actually did enjoy my summer of "67" at Kadena. Okinawa was a great place to be stationed in those days. Filet Mignon dinner \$1.00 at the club. Cigarettes \$1.03 a carton at the commissary. The bars and nasons on BC street, or ride the bus up to Moonlight Beach on a day off. Even the "Tiger" fiasco had a upside, for I received several awards due to my being attached to the "Young Tiger Task Force" later on.

Now you know if you happened to catch a glimpse of a SR-71 at Kadena in 1967, what you were actually viewing was the infamous A-12 of the Central Intelligence Agency. I know Habu, because I was there!!!!

The B-58 was fat, but the XB-70 went 2,000 mph. I believe the F-4 Phantom was also faster, over 1,800 mph in test.

"Hap" Wyman

Howard "Hap" Wyman

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