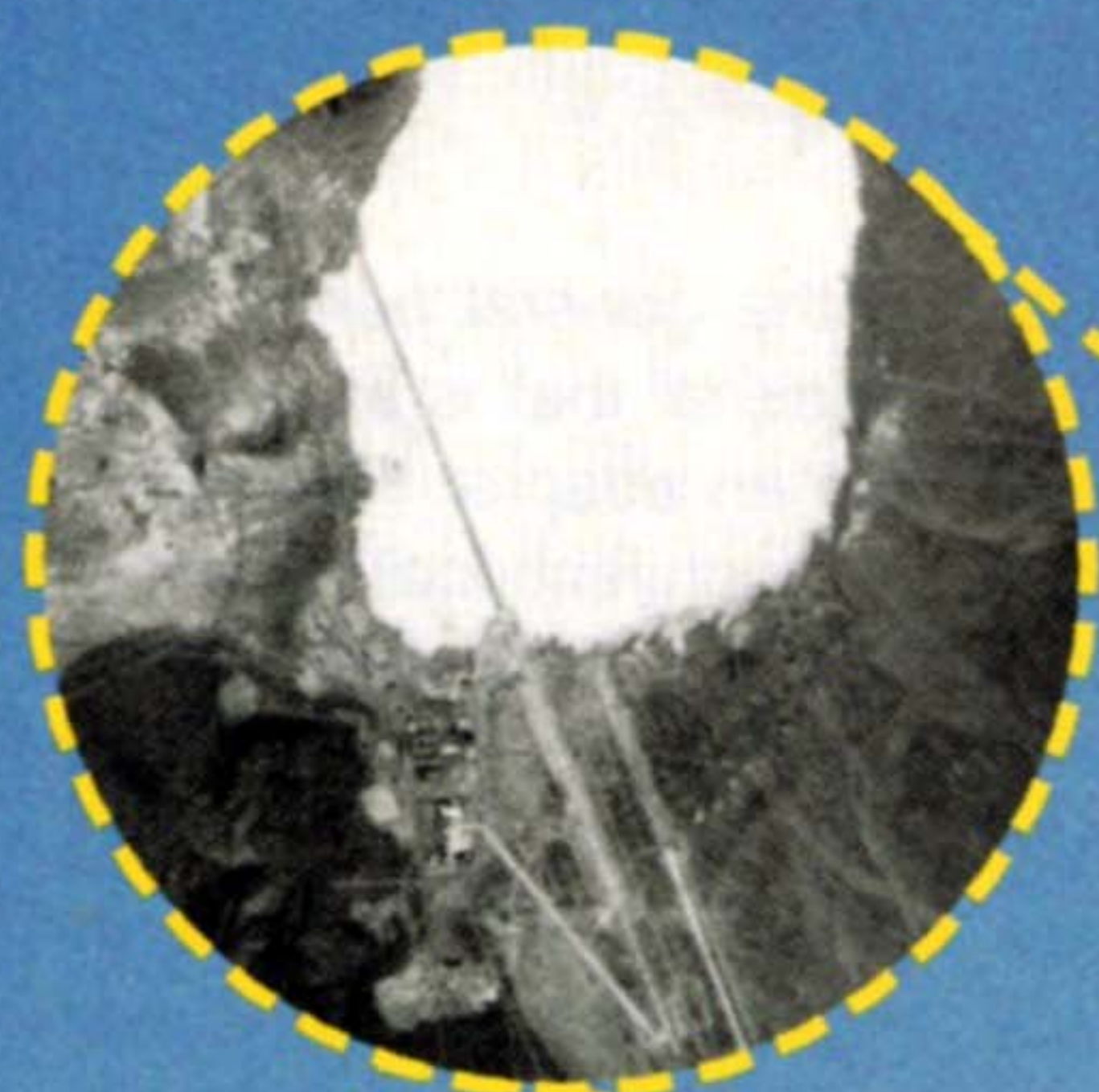


The secrets of

AREA 51

Part 5



Mission possible. The majestic Reville Peak dominates the Nevada desert landscape, standing 8,910ft. By scaling its treacherous heights, you could peer straight down Dreamland's runways. *Meinrad Eberle*

Your mission, should you choose to accept it . . .

Viewing Area 51 has been going on for years. In fact it became such a problem that the US government actually swallowed ownership of the Nevada desert that once gave the best vantage point. One of these spots was known by the somewhat ironic name of Freedom Ridge, its 12-mile distance from the base offering an excellent view across the desert floor roughly half-way along the six-mile runway. However, with its withdrawal from public use in April 1995 along with the White Sides Peak viewing location, the honour of Dreamland's nearest viewing spot fell to Tikaboo Peak.

The climbs to all of these haunts are arduous, and have been well documented over the years and offer similar viewing angle albeit from different distances. However, what *AI's* band of merry stealthchasers had in mind was to conquer Reville Peak, a whopping great mountain some 50 miles away from the facility. Distant it may be, but this mountain is so high that you can see right down the two runways etched into Groom Lake's parched floor, with a few bonuses at the same time. Now that's worth the effort.

Change your underpants! A close call as a Groom Lake-assigned MH-60 Pavehawk attempts to intimidate the photographer during the days of Freedom Ridge. The dust trail in the background is from speeding 'Cammo Dudes' on their way to make sure security is maintained...

Chris Pocock

You've read the articles and you've seen the pictures — so now get your hiking boots out, your maps open and your sun cream on and go see it for yourself. Yes the journey is hard and yes you have to be careful, but a trip to Dreamland is one of those things that just has to be done! This month, we give you a guide of how to get to a brand-new viewing site, where you can look straight down the barrels of Area 51's runways!



We hand over now to the first-ever stealthchasing team to have conquered the mighty Reveille Peak for a run-down of how you could see it for yourself — if you're up to it!

HEAD FOR THE HILLS!

Reveille Peak rises to an altitude of 8,910ft (or about 2,700 meters). This may not sound like much to a native of the Swiss Alps or even a native of the American Rockies, but in Nevada this is a drastic rise of almost 4,000ft above the surrounding drainage basins. You are guaranteed never to forget the sight as you crest the hill of Queen City Summit on NV375 and catch your first glimpse of Reveille Peak. She is a dramatic and majestic mountain, towering above the landscape, and unequalled in stature for hundreds of square miles.

But is she ever remote! If you are hoping to find in the maps the faint line of 4x4 track or an old mining claim trail leading to her lower reaches, forget it, there are none whatsoever. And so the fun will begin long before you even start to climb — your first challenge will be to simply get to the base of the mountain itself!

It is recommended that you earmark a basecamp area, which should be a relatively flat area of ground with trees for cover and with a good ascent route to the summit. For Reveille, there are three suitable areas but each of these is no less than 3.25 miles from the nearest hint of a road.

Needless to say, you need to have rented a good 4x4. You are guaranteed a stiff challenge, but it will be a fun one as well. But regardless, upon reaching and establishing your chosen basecamp, the fun will continue. Depending on the weather and your physical condition, you could start the ascent either that evening, or at dawn the next morning.

Assuming that you reach a basecamp of about 6,500ft-6,600ft elevation with all of your heavier gear (water being the key item), then the ascent possibilities look like this: The team identified five ascent routes, the one-way hiking distance from basecamp varies from 1.5 to 2.0 miles, the elevation gain varies from 1,812 to 2,312 vertical feet. Each route will encounter some steep going that will burn you leg muscles for sure. All of these routes are on the southeast quadrant of the peak, where there does not appear to be any dangerous cliffs or exposed ridges... The routes are not particularly technical or dangerous, just steep.

Each route is unique and has its advantages and disadvantages, so it's probably best if you make any decisions with the general consensus of all your party, studying the maps and talking over the details together.

A few of the routes utilise a couple of flat-looking ridge-line saddles, which may provide for just the perfect 'rustic'-type camping spots, should you have the energy and enthusiasm to attempt an evening, or even night-time, ascent.

Take the high road

The Groom Lake facility is located in the Emigrant Valley, north of the Papoose Mountain Range and south of the Groom Range near the western edge of Lincoln County, Nv.

The best plan of action is to fly into Las Vegas' McCarran International Airport and leave Las Vegas to the northeast via the I-15 Highway. You then need to pick up the US-93, which takes you north to Alamo (filling up with gas if you can).

The world-famous 'Alien Highway' (State Highway 375) branches off the US-93 just by the (very) small towns of Ash Springs and Crystal Springs. Now you're getting close. The Alien Highway runs for 100 miles southeast to northwest through the desert along the northern boundary of the vast military restricted area. There are many interesting tracks, trails and landmarks to be explored, but more of those later. About halfway along is Rachel, the watering hole of all Interceptors and Stealthchasers world-wide and a whopping 150 miles from where you touched down in Las Vegas. This is the nearest civilisation to Area 51 (27 miles from the base's control tower) with a population of around 100. It is here that any expedition should kick off from, the town offering modest accommodation and refreshment before the days ahead. The most important advice would be to purchase a guide to the area while you're there. These indispensable and incredibly detailed documents cover everything you need to know about venturing into the desert and spell out the dangers involved — both the natural and 'Cammo Dude' varieties. They are available from Rachel's Area 51 Research Center and the Little A'Le'Inn for around \$15-\$20. Don't leave home without one!



Basically, whatever you do there is a distinct chance that you are being watched while you do it. If you are exploring the area, NEVER cross the border (marked by the orange posts), though the distance involved in conquering Reveille Peak will keep you well away from the danger zone. Meinrad Eberle

HERE GOES!

A full description of how to see it for yourself, written by 'Navigator'

The weather was perfect for a mountaineering expedition as our forces, one by one, found their way to Rachel, Nevada, the closest civilisation to Dreamland.

The sun, however, was already diving for the hazy western horizon as we gathered in the Little A'Le'Inn, so time was not ours to spare. With maps sprawled across the pool table and curious tourists trying to look over our shoulders, we decided on our ascent route, furrowed our brows at the prospect of miles and miles of roadless terrain, and gulped down 'Alien Burgers' in an attempt at a decent meal. Within no time, watches were synchronised and our two expedition vehicles (EeVeEs) were headed northwest on Highway 375.

What we believe to be the easiest way to approach and ascend Reveille Peak is described here, but there are other options, some of which will be mentioned later. Our approach was from the eastern side of the Reveille Range, in the Railroad Valley, and

our established basecamp and ascent route are on the southeast flanks of the mountain.

Reveille Peak lies at approximately Lat: 37.828 Lon: 116.129. Required maps are the Reveille Peak and Reveille Peak SE 7.5 min series USGS quads, and also helpful is the Cactus Flat USGS 1:100 000 scale quad.

From the town of Rachel, drive north on State Highway 375 for 15.9 miles and turn left on the Cedar Pipeline Road.

Head west on this road for 8.2 miles to the Cedar Pipeline Ranch. To our surprise, this road has recently been widened and chip-sealed (blacktopped) from its eastern terminus with Highway 375 all the way west as far as the eye can see to the Cedar Pass in the Nellis Range! This now

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NEW RUNWAY

OLD RUNWAY

We're watching... The first ever picture of Area 51 from the new site looking straight down the twin runways. The buildings to the right are the famed 'Red Hat' hangars. *Steve Hauser*

makes Cedar Pipeline Road an all weather, permanent highway capable of supporting heavy traffic. A civil engineering project of this magnitude in such a remote location was no doubt an expensive one, but hey, we were able to enjoy our tax dollars at work by driving to the Cedar Pipeline Ranch without even having to worry about spilling our drinks!

At the ranch, you will see a corral on the right, and two dirt roads leading off to the north. One of these heads northwest into the Reveille Valley, the other heads northeast back into the Railroad Valley. Make a sharp right turn onto the road heading northeast, and reset your odometer. Mileage for this route follows:

0.0: Intersection with Cedar Pipeline Road at Cedar Pipeline Ranch.

0.1: Corral on left

1.6: Fork in the road, go left. This is a much less travelled dirt two-track, which is rough and sandy in spots. It also had a strip of high gravel and vegetation down the centre, which would give low clearance vehicles a tough go and would be easy to ground on.

The road to nowhere. The terrain is unforgiving and it is imperative that you not only use the right vehicle, but carry enough supplies to last a few days in the desert if the worst comes to the worst. Here our team's expedition vehicles take a break from the rough-riding close to their basecamp at the foot of Reveille. *Meinrad Eberle*



For this reason, high clearance is recommended, but we've seen less suitable vehicles make it into much rougher places. Continuing the mileage onto this two-track road:

1.8: Hill down

2.3: Cross over the Railroad Valley wash

2.7: Hill up

4.4: Old, dry reservoir on left

6.0: Stop here!

Okay, from here, things get a little tricky. Following our exact vehicle route to our exact basecamp is not necessary for a successful ascent, but finding our ascent route to the summit, at least if approaching from the eastern side, probably is. For that reason, it's important that you at least get to the correct area at the base of the mountain before attempting a climb. I'll explain how to get there as best I can.

From your current position at mile 6.0 on the dirt two-track, look west, Reveille Peak is the tallest peak in the mountain range directly west of you. Looking WNW, you can't miss it. From here, the peak is about four miles away. Now look below and slightly to the left of Reveille Peak. Just where the foothills begin to rise out of the alluvial fan plain, you will see a very prominent lone tree. It is a Pinon Pine sitting all by itself on the side of a wash just north of some low hills. We came to call this tree the Lone Pine. Lone Pine sits on the northern

side of a shallow wash, and immediately south of this wash, adjacent to Lone Pine, is a low hill with a large field of light coloured grass on its side. That is your landmark! Your goal is to eventually drive along the southern side of that shallow wash, through the field of light coloured grass, with Lone Pine on your right.

Now, this is where things get fun, because there are no roads that approach the base of Reveille Peak on the eastern side of the range. Trust us, we searched. So, from mile 6.0, simply (yeah, right) head WNW across the desert brush toward the landmarks described above. Keep Lone Pine in your sights, and watch out for cacti and very large rocks hiding behind small brushes. We marked the point where we turned left off of the dirt two-track at mile 6.0 with two piles of dirt topped with dry cow pies (hey, there weren't any big rocks). If you can find this, you may be able to find our tracks up to the hill, but at any rate, don't give up. Despite the numerous boulder fields, it is possible to drive to the area on the hill with the light coloured grass just south of Lone Pine.

Keep in mind this is off-road travel at its roughest, and high-clearance, four wheel drive is mandatory! To be safe, it is best to have at least two vehicles in your party, because the chances of getting a couple of flat tires or hung up on a large rock are very good. Carry with you all the water, equipment, and supplies you might need to survive in the desert for two or three days. Not joking, it's imperative.

Always prepare for the worst, because if you get into trouble out here, you are going to be the only ones around to get yourself out of it. Help may be hours or days away. Perhaps most importantly, let someone staying behind know where you are going.

Once you make it to the area near Lone Pine, find your way down into the shallow wash that lies between Lone Pine, which is on its north bank, and the hill, which is on its southern side. Continue to drive west up this dry wash and around the northern side of the hill. After only about one or two tenths of a mile, the wash will split into three. The three tributaries form three shallow valleys and are separated from each other by two ridges. Make sense? Think of a three-pronged fork, and the ridges are the

GROOM DRY LAKE

RED HAT HANGARS



Yeeehah! The team in situ having scaled nearly 9,000ft — the joint Swiss/American members being Meinrad Eberle, Steve Hauser and Navigator — complete with the 'Big Momma' telescope lens. *Meinrad Eberle*

two spaces between the prongs. You want to drive straight up the ridge on the left (the one between the left and middle forks of the wash). Continue driving on this ridge as far as you can. We made it all the way to the rock outcroppings to the southwest, and there we established our Reveille basecamp.

If you make it his far, congratulations! Pull out the lawn chairs and make a toast to a life full of adventure. The views from basecamp into the Railroad Valley are truly majestic, and well worth the effort put into getting there. As I watched the evening shadows silently slither across the valley to engulf the distant mountains, extinguishing as they go the glorious pastels of the setting sun, a lump welled in my throat and a tear almost found its way out of the corner of my eye. Moments such as this are reason enough to venture into the desolate corners of our world and seek a bit of solace from the simple things of life.

The total driving distance off road from mile 6.0 on the dirt two track to basecamp is 3.4 miles. To find our basecamp on a map, look on the left side of the Reveille Peak SE 7.5 min quad. Just to the right of the word REVEILLE, there is a hill marked with an 'X', labelled 6607T. Our basecamp is 100 yards north of that hill.

CONQUERED

After a beautiful evening peppered with tales of black aircraft and desert adventure stories, washed down with hot soup cooked over an open fire, we turned in for an early night. Our hope was that, upon rising with the sun, we could make the summit before the afternoon haze and flat mid-day light. The mountain, however, had other plans for us!

Let me just say right now, Reveille Peak, no matter how you climb her, is HARD! The climb is about two miles one way, with an elevation gain of 2,212ft from our basecamp. We have all climbed Tikaboo Peak before and we debated on just how many Tikaboos we should rank Reveille, but the numbers four and five were tossed around quite a bit. There is another higher mountain (Mt Charleston), but at least that's got a trail! To get an idea of the difficulty of Reveille, think of the steepest, loosest, most frustrating climb you can imagine, and doing it for over a mile! Reveille is extremely strenuous, and should be

attempted only by experienced hikers in good physical condition who are familiar with the desert environment.

Do NOT attempt to climb Reveille Peak without detailed maps of the entire area. There are no trails here, and some route-finding skills will be necessary to find your way to the summit. Map references here are to the Reveille Peak Quadrangle and Reveille Peak SE Quadrangle 7.5 min series USGS topographic maps. From the area of the Reveille basecamp, as described earlier, hike west then northwest in or near the wash that passes by basecamp. This is the same wash that we drove up to get here, and the same wash that passes beside Lone Pine. This wash is on the southeastern side of Reveille Peak. Its beginning is shown on the Reveille Peak quad just to the right of the word RANGE in the upper right, and it continues onto the Reveille Peak SE quad, flowing southeast then east. It passes next to basecamp at the point labelled 6607T just to the right of the word REVEILLE on the upper left side of the map. Hiking up this wash will lead you into a sort of box-canyon, and eventually the wash will disappear and you will be faced with steep slopes on nearly all sides. As you hike up the wash into this canyon, observe the terrain in front of you (facing northwest) carefully. You will see a



ridgeline with a low saddle above the point where the wash begins. This saddle is marked on the Reveille Peak quad with an 'X' and labelled 7818AT (next to the R in the word RANGE). Your goal now is to climb to any point on this ridge to the right of the saddle. Simply choose a route and start climbing, but it will be treacherous and exhausting any way you do it. The slopes are very steep, and the rocks are incredibly loose. Be careful, and choose your steps wisely!

This first climb to the first ridge is the hardest part of the ascent, and it nearly broke our souls. But, upon making it to the ridge, we were rewarded with a fantastic view of Groom Lake! This part of the Reveille Range lies directly in line with the runways at Groom, and, with good optics, the view is fascinating. Although the distances involved are great (Groom lies some 50 miles away), with the right equipment even individual structures can be seen. Since you are looking at the base lengthwise from the north, most of the interesting buildings are hidden from view behind those facilities on the northern



Proof is in the plaque. The 1933-dated USGS reference point on top of Reveille. *Steve Hauser*

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side of the base. But the perspective of peering right down the barrel of the two runways is unique, and the view through a good set of binoculars is guaranteed to send a chill down your spine. Those with a good knowledge of the base layout and who are familiar with the popular views from the east may find this northern perch an intriguing change of pace. Using image stabilised 50x binoculars, I have no doubt that had an aircraft been on the runway, it could have been identified.

If your only goal is to get a view of Groom, then you need not climb any higher. But, as we soon discovered, with each hard won foot of elevation gain, an even greater reward gets closer to fruition.

From this ridge, you can see Reveille Peak to the northwest. There is another ridge that drops down from the summit of Reveille Peak to the southeast, with yet another saddle at its lowest point. Climb northeast up the ridge you are on for about 200 yards, then contour to your left and climb up to the saddle on Reveille's southeast ridge described above. From here, simply climb ridge to the summit. The rocks on this ridge aren't as loose as elsewhere, but the trees become rather thick, and it is easy to lose sight of the summit and wander too far off the ridge. Stick to the south facing sides of this ridge near the top when the going gets tough. Just when you begin to wonder whether all of this is worth it (or did you begin to wonder that long ago?) climb the last 20ft of rock up and onto the summit. The climb took us four hours, with plenty of breaks for water and rest.

At the top, as you catch your breath and take in the view, it is almost impossible not to let out a loud

'Yeeaaaawwwooooohooooo!!' You've made it! The summit is large and flat and free of trees, and the views are spectacular! Unobstructed for 360-degrees is a view of thousands of square miles of central Nevada wilderness. The restricted airspace over the Nellis Range is visible in its entirety and a large chunk of the restricted area on the ground is visible as well.

One can see northeast up the entire length of the Railroad Valley, including The Wall, Lunar Crater, and even the area of the 'Project Faultless' site and Moore's Station. The radar site on the hill east of basecamp Airfield is visible, although basecamp itself is hidden behind some hills. To the west, the entire Reveille Valley is visible, but the peaks of the Kawich Range beyond block all the view into Cactus Flat. Unfortunately, climbing Reveille won't unearth the secrets of the Tonopah Test Range and Site Four. Looking to the South into the Kawich Valley, however, provides some neat views of the Kawich Dry Lake environs, full of radar sites and bombing targets. On the distant southern horizon are Pahute and Rainier Mesas in the Nevada Test Site. On a clear day, one should be able to see the lone emplacement tower on Rainier, still frozen in time awaiting the end of the test ban treaties.

But the real reward for climbing so high is the view to the southeast. For as you near the summit and peer beyond Groom, another splash of white becomes visible. This distant dry lake, shimmering in the sun and partially hidden beyond a ridge of hills south of Groom, is none other than our enigmatic, reclusive friend, Papoose Lake! Yup, Reveille provides those who venture to its summit a bonus prize: a view of Groom and Papoose Lakes — together. Again, the distances are great, and any amount of haze will ruin the view, but there you have it.

On the summit we found a register under some rocks near the USGS survey monument which marks the peak. Left on 17 December 1933, it indicates that there have actually been seven documented ascents of Reveille Peak prior to ours. We also discovered that there is a dirt two-track road that approaches the peak from the western side. This track heads east from the Reveille Valley Road at Willow Witch Well,

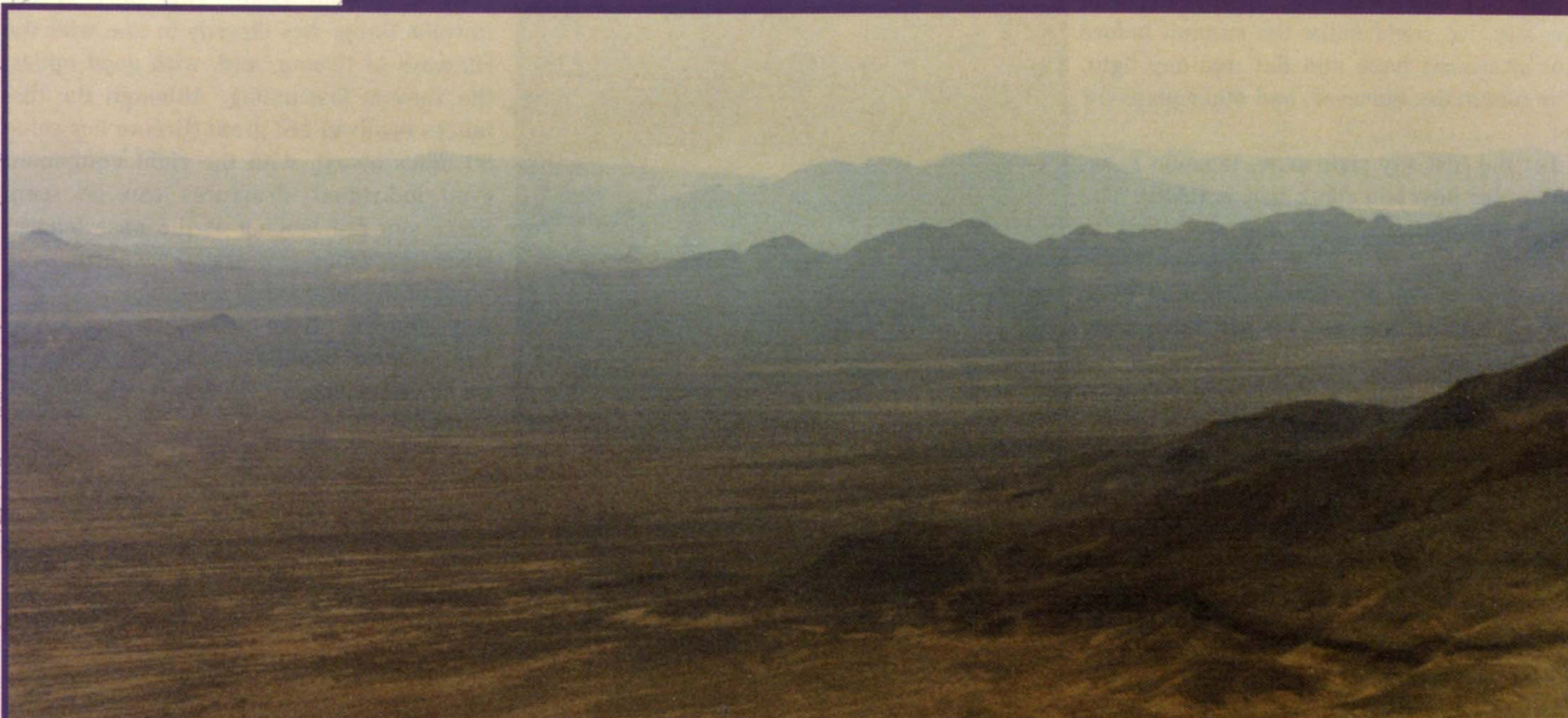
and winds its way to the foothills due west of the peak itself. It is not shown on any maps. We suspect that most ascents are made from the western side, utilising this road to gain access to the base of the mountain, but the climb from that side looks even steeper than our route listed here. We also pondered some other possible routes on the mountain's eastern side, but after looking at them during our climb, we are glad we chose the route we did. The other ridges and slopes that we could see all looked very steep. Study the maps and weigh all the alternatives before deciding for yourself on which route to take.

To return to basecamp, simply retrace your ascent route. Going down is a lot quicker, but not much easier. All told, give yourself one full day to climb Reveille Peak from basecamp. Exhausted and sore from our climb we collapsed into our lawn chairs back at the camp. Although the view of the heavens that moonless night was breathtaking, it was not long after sunset that our desire for sleep overcame our search for the profound truths that might be held in the night sky.

The following morning, on our way back to Rachel, we found ourselves at an impromptu highway christening ceremony. It seems that the endless jet-black ribbon of the newly surfaced Cedar Pipeline Road called a certain members of our group like a blank canvass. Besides, a road so obviously important needs to be properly identified. We name roads after our visionaries, after our leaders, and after our heroes. The New Cedar Pipeline Road is now no exception. With a day-glo palate of the spray variety, the proverbial ribbon was cut on the newly named 'Interceptor Highway'. The location is a shady spot, with a beautiful view of Reveille Peak in the distance.

So get on out there. Go and try to get the first concrete proof of Aurora. Even if you fail, you'll have a great story to tell...

Out of this world. Groom Lake and Papoose Lake together in the same picture for the first time, as seen from the brand new viewpoint. On the far left is Area 51, with S-4 to the far right (separated by the Papoose Mountain Range). Meinrad Eberle





SPECIAL

This month **HOWARD CURTIS** turns his attention to a selection of 'black' web sites

It is said that the Internet has allowed those without a voice to have their say and those whose opinion might once have been gagged to finally be able to be heard. When it comes to what might be happening at Area 51, or what might next emerge from Lockheed's 'Skunk Works', the Internet provides the opportunity for such information to pass to a much wider audience.

It will come as no surprise to discover that the number of sites covering black projects, bases and the like is quite considerable! It should also be pointed out that some of the information included in these sites is controversial and the information contained on a few may be the sort of material that others would wish was not in the public domain; indeed, in the course of producing this article, one of the sites we had planned to cover was shut down quickly, allegedly by a US government agency. For those interested in finding out more, read on!

Desertsecrets.com

<http://desertsecrets.com>

Our March 2000 issue highlighted the exploits of Meinrad 'Swiss Mountain Bat' Eberle and Steve 'AF-2' Hauser. Steve's desert secrets site expands further on their activities and the observations that they have made over the years. As readers are aware, the pair have plenty of experience of the locality in the vicinity of secret bases and a section of the site is devoted to their trips, giving details of how to get to possible vantage points and an idea of what might be seen by those who succeed. Such exploits are likely to lead one into close contact with the law and those wishing to attempt a trip to one of these points may well find the section on this site devoted to local laws of great value. The site provides a host of information about Area 51, giving a brief history of its development, with maps and aerial photographs. Tonopah Test Range, once home to the USAF's F-117A fleet, is also put under the spotlight, with mention of other possible test sites around the US.

Other sections of this site provide plenty of further information. A fascinating section devoted to patent applications by aerospace manufacturers may well provide an insight into the types of design being worked on or even already flying (see last month). There is also a section devoted to photo tips, providing hints on taking images from such long distances. This is a very useful site from which to start an exploration into black projects and a links section provides a few ideas about where to go next.

Above Top Secret - Uncovering Government Conspiracies

<http://www.abovetopsecret.com>

This is another large web site devoted to black projects and here can be found plenty of background information on a variety of topics. Sections cover Area 51 and other test facilities, special projects such as Reagan's 'Star Wars' initiative, arms contractors and agencies believed to be involved in black projects. Aircraft projects and new technologies are given extensive coverage, as are reports of sightings of black aircraft. Elsewhere can be found information on other, more controversial issues that fall outside the coverage of this article.

UFO Mind

<http://www.ufomind.com>

This site, which claims to be the World's largest UFO site, is home to the Area 51 Research Centre. The Area 51 Research Centre is a private clearing house for information about Area 51, government secrecy and certain UFO claims. The Research Centre consists of three full-time employees and a loose-knit network of researchers. The section covering Area 51 may only be a fraction of this web site but it is still huge — to detail all the content of this section of the UFO Mind site would still be a major task. Among the items here are sections covering the 'Janet' aircraft which shuttle workers in and out of Area 51, maps, a mailing list, links to others sites and even a selection of books that can be purchased on-line.

Area 51 Headquarters

<http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Atlantis/1545>

This is one of a number of web sites devoted principally to Area 51 and it provides pretty comprehensive coverage. Sections are included on two of the aircraft that may be using the top secret base near Groom lake — the TR-3A and Aurora. A detailed look at 'Janet Airlines', the operation responsible for ferrying personnel in and out of Area 51 from nearby Las Vegas, includes photographs of some of the aircraft and even a set of schedules based on observations of aircraft movements to and from both fields. A useful message board contains discussion topics relating to the theme of the site and a set of links provides a springboard for a further dive into the world of black aircraft!

Dreamland Resort

<http://www.dreamlandresort.com>

As with the 'Area 51 Headquarters' site, this is another site devoted to Area 51, this time with even more detail about possible activities at the base. A section devoted to transportation links will be very useful for anyone planning to visit the locality, providing details on car hire, restaurants, hotels and other accommodation. Once you have arrived, the site provides information about scanner frequencies, includes maps and possible viewing points and has details of previous trips. As with other sites, an illustrated section is devoted to the 'Janet' aircraft, giving registrations and other details. A discussion forum is provided here and the site is also the originator of a mailing list about Area

51. Both this site and 'Area 51 Headquarters' come with sections providing historic photographs of the base, alongside images of some of its more recent activities but this one also includes a novel sideline in gifts as well.

Mystery Aircraft

<http://www.fas.org.ird/mystery>

The Federation of American Scientists has a large section of its web site devoted to accounts and articles on black aircraft. Pages cover the history of machines such as the U-2, A-12/SR-71, F-117, B-2 and some cancelled designs, along with details on current projects. Sub-sections on more recent projects cover 'Tacit Blue', X-30, 'Have Region', 'Science Realm', 'Science Dawn', Hyper-X, Aurora and the TR-3A. Each section is illustrated with artist's images or actual photographs and each contains a bibliography at the end, indicating the source of the material. A set of links is also provided from this site, although at the time of review a lot of these were found to be not working.

Blue Fire

<http://www.serve.com/mahood.bluefire.htm>

Tom Mahood's Blue Fire pages collect together a host of material about the Nellis complex, covering Area 51, Tonopah and other sites within the Nellis Ranges. Among the usual information about activity around the bases mentioned, this site contains original photographs taken by the author in flight over some of the areas within the Nellis Ranges. A fascinating sub-section, headed 'The Search for 928' covers Tom's search for the crash site of A-12 60-6928, which failed to return on a mission from Groom Lake.

The Black Triangle E-group

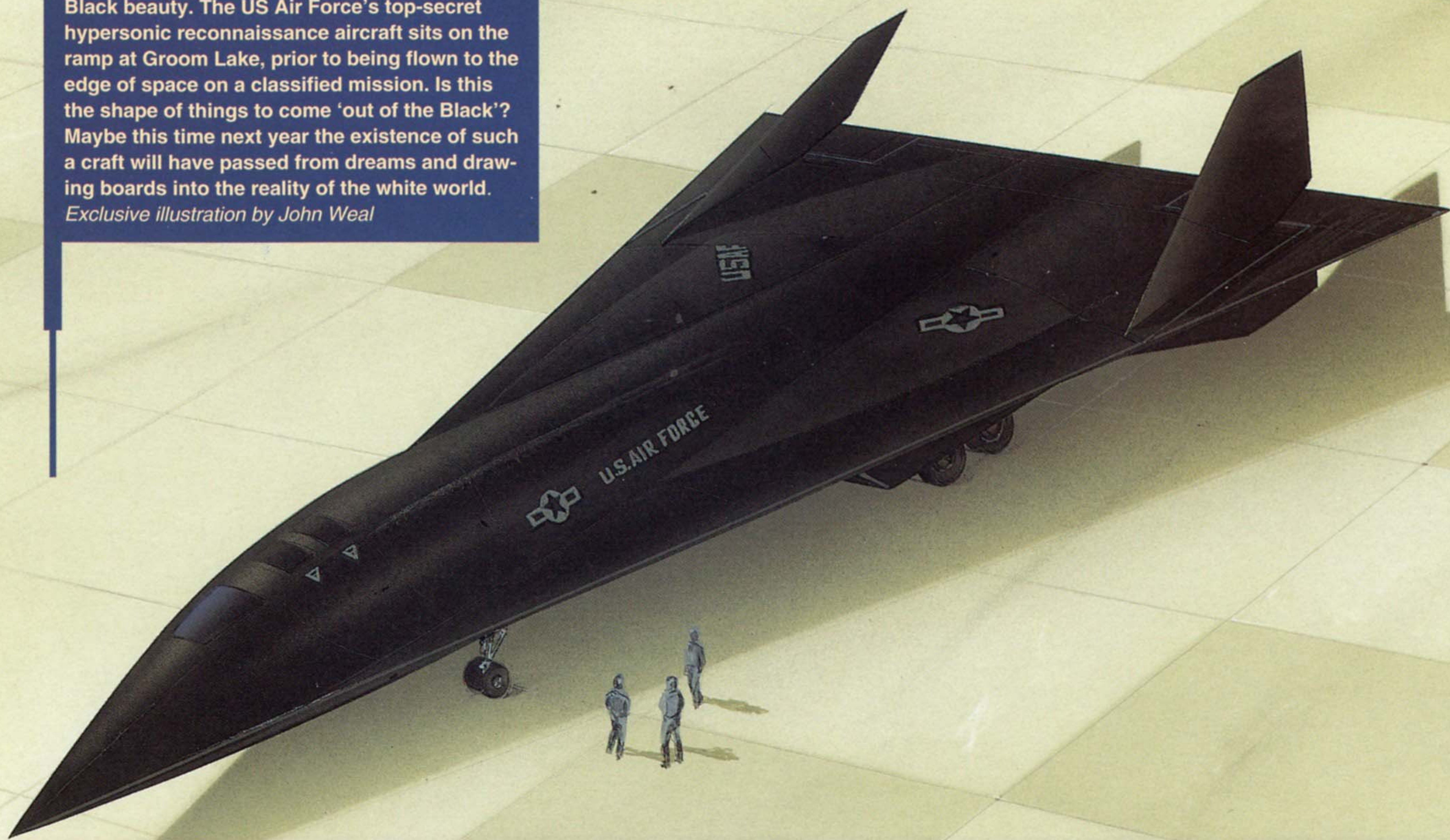
<http://members.aol.com/SecretJet/>

One of the biggest and best resources to do with black projects is Bill Turner's 'Black Triangle E-group'.

For the uninitiated, an E-group is set up (via the Internet) so that anyone within the group can post a single E-mail to a central point, which will then be forwarded to everyone within the group. (A list of aviation E-groups can be found on The 'AirNet' Links Site, <http://fly.to/AirNet/>.)

As well as running the E-group, Bill has created a web site that contains a mass of information about black projects, secret air bases, air band monitoring and more besides. This site also contains a host of information about bases in the UK, sightings in UK airspace and even articles covering incidents such as the crash at Boscombe Down of an unknown aircraft several years ago. Naturally Groom Lake, Tonopah Test Range and other bases such as Palmdale and Edwards AFB get a great deal of coverage, along with much more in a separate section titled 'The Black Triangle Resource'. The site hosts a message board, a chat room and also has details about how to join the 'Black Triangle E-group'. As if this wasn't enough, this site has a very comprehensive set of links pages that should go a long way towards satisfying the curiosity of the interested surfer.

Black beauty. The US Air Force's top-secret hypersonic reconnaissance aircraft sits on the ramp at Groom Lake, prior to being flown to the edge of space on a classified mission. Is this the shape of things to come 'out of the Black'? Maybe this time next year the existence of such a craft will have passed from dreams and drawing boards into the reality of the white world. Exclusive illustration by John Weal



The secret of AREA 51 Part 2

Last month we broke the news, this month we bring you the views. Those of you brave enough to have caught last month's 'Top Secret' issue will know that either a Black cat is about to be let out of the bag or it's already roaming the skies at Mach 8... In this second part we investigate what is out there in the secretive world of US Black Projects, (illustrated by exclusive pictures and artwork) and provide an analytical comment on the latest sighting from Area 51

Recovering from his 'stealthchasing' trip to the mountains of Groom Lake, Meinrad 'Swiss Mountain Bat' Eberle dusted off the remnants of the Nevada desert from his Swiss Raichie hiking boots, packed away his Bearcat 3000 XLT scanner, folded up his USGS maps and settled into his Bat Cave. Bewildered and exhausted from his adventure thousands of miles away over the Atlantic he may have been, but there was no hiding the huge smile of satisfaction that beamed from his face.

As readers will know from last month's groundbreaking issue, he and three others had witnessed what they believe to have been the so-called 'Aurora' hypersonic spy-plane take off from Area 51 — right before their eyes and in broad daylight.

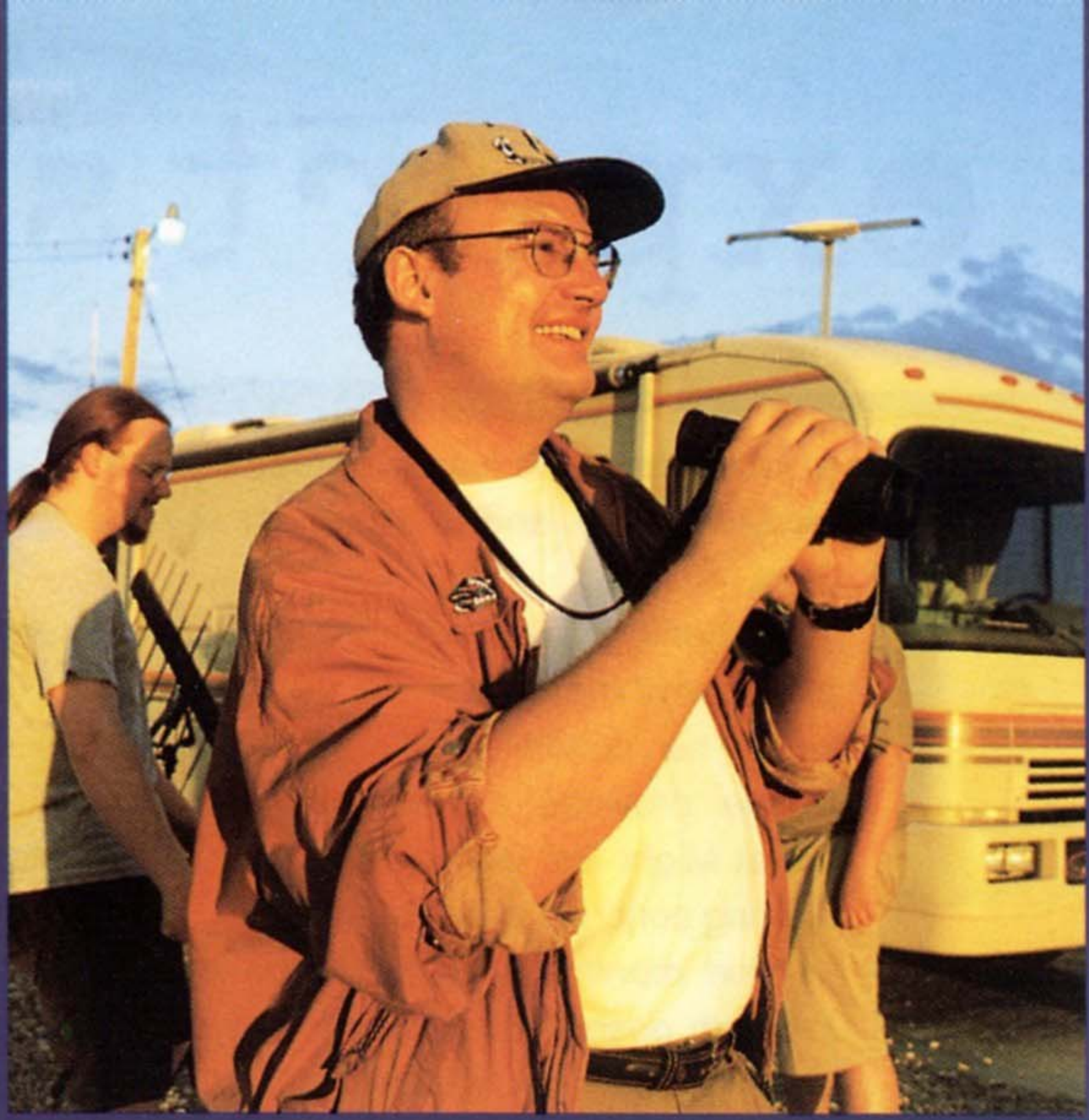
For Meinrad, it was the realisation of a dream implanted inside every 'stealthchaser' and 'truth-seeker' at birth — a Black project alive and well, and thriving in the enigmatic confines of Dreamland.

But how, why, where and what? *AI* dons its shades, climbs inside its black-windowed saloon and goes undercover...

Interview with a Mountain Bat

Part 1 told you how Meinrad and his two compatriots had ventured to Nevada last September to conquer Reveille Peak, an uncharted Groom Lake viewing site that overlooks the top secret US installation from the Northwest. Having successfully completed his assigned mission (see Part 3), Meinrad spent the last few days of his trip on Tikaboo Peak, the 'regular' haunt of 'Groomies' wishing to watch the daily goings on at the world's most popular secret base (!).

Whilst in-situ, our man was alerted by his scanner coming alive to Groom's ATC frequency; *'Traffic departing Runway 32 is a fast mover, the wind calm, cleared for take-off...'* In an instant, experienced eyes were put behind image-stabilised binoculars and trained onto the base that doesn't officially exist. A sleek black silhouette was



In his element, Meinrad surveys the skies at a 'Roving Sands' exercise in New Mexico last year.
Meinrad 'Swiss Mountain Bat' Eberle

say is that in comparison with the other military types I've seen from the same spot, the 'fast mover' had a much more blended canopy — it was not raised like say an F-16. As for the undercarriage, I could not make it out at all — but I'm sure it had some!

AI: *What magnification were the binoculars?*

SMB: I used 15x45 Canon binos. These are the latest Image Stabilised technology ensuring no motion shake and giving superb clarity. I had a video with me at the time, at 40x magnification, but the aircraft was already moving down the runway and I had no time to use it.

AI: *How long were you out there?*

SMB: On this particular trip, I was in the US for about a week and it was about my third time out there in less than 12 months. I climbed Reveille on 4 September with two US colleagues, before saying goodbye to them and picking up my two Swiss colleagues on the 6th for the Tikaboo ascent on the 8th. I had other arrangements after that, and one of my friends needed to leave for Switzerland later that day so we came down at about 11 o'clock.

AI: *Were there any previous transmissions on the radio?*

SMB: No, that was the first one relating to Groom.

AI: *Do you regret the fact that you did not take any pictures?*

SMB: Of course. Even a snap shot with the

The truth is OUT THERE



Dreamland — whether you believe in Black Projects or not, the base is there and it's there for a reason.
steve_hauser@desertsecrets.com

AI: *What speed did the aircraft take off at? Was it like an F-16 or a C-130? And what angle did it climb out at?*

SMB: It was faster than an F-16. At first I thought that it had taken the entire runway to lift off, but after studying maps afterwards, it lifted by the intersection by what is known as the 'Northern Taxiway'. The aircraft climbed out roughly at 45-degrees, gaining altitude before banking away to the west and showing us its huge backside.

AI: *Did you see a second aircraft departing afterwards?*

SMB: No, we did not pay attention to any other movements afterwards.

AI: *Do you believe in captured aliens, captured flying saucers etc?*

SMB: No, I don't believe in such stuff. But I do agree that there are strange things in the atmosphere, purely from the number of reports — even in my home country.

AI: *What was the purpose of the trip?*

SMB: To check out Reveille Peak — we were the first 'Groomies' to have conquered it. (The peak is roughly 50 miles northwest of the base, and stands at 8,800ft).

video would have been better than nothing. It was just such a quick reaction, we had to decide which to use. We all went for the binos to see the best image possible. Maybe next time!

AI: *Was it the only movement you saw during the whole time up there?*

SMB: No, we saw and photographed a JANET that had landed and was taxiing along Runway 32. The pics (see last month) were taken with a Canon 300mm Image Stabilised lens.

AI: *In comparison with this lens, how much closer was the view through the binoculars.*

SMB: The view through the binoculars was much, much closer.

on its take-off run along Groom's six-mile runway and there was no time to lose. The aircraft, accompanied by a deep rumble, lifted from the desert floor and turned to reveal its featureless triangular configuration to its awe-struck audience, before climbing away over the mountains to expose its huge rear section (suits you sir!)

Anyone that had witnessed such an event and had lived to tell the tale just had to be talked to. There were questions that needed to be asked and facts that had to be put straight, so we hooked up with the man himself inside his Swiss Bat Cave...

AI: *How close were you? How much can you really make out from such a range?*

SMB: Tikaboo Peak is just over 25 miles away from Groom Lake's control tower. Sure, its difficult to make out details from that range, but I've seen F-16s, F-15s and F-117s operating from Groom on a number of occasions, so I had a really good comparison of size and shape. Of course there is also the regular Boeing 737 'JANET' flights, which are easy to make out. In terms of aircraft details, all I can

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Over to the experts

We now hand over to some of the aviation world's most respected voices for their opinions on the event. Firstly, **Jon Lake** plays 'devil's advocate' and casts a critical eye over the sighting. Having written widely on military aviation technology, tactics and aircraft, Jon is widely recognised as an authority on this subject. Jon's output has included a book entitled 'How to fly and fight in the F-117' for which he interviewed several pilots in unprecedented detail. Jon won't mind us saying that without concrete evidence he is hard to convince about all things 'Black'. He has some very interesting points to make and some searching questions to ask.

Devil's advocate

It might seem perverse to publish a 'New Black Airplane' sighting one month, and to apparently undermine it the next but good journalism demands that if there are two sides to a story or argument, then both sides should be presented, to allow the reader to make up his or her own mind. We are in the business of aviation journalism after all, and not in the business of publishing one-sided.

And while I would not wish to dismiss the 'Aurora' sighting reported last month out of hand, I would raise some questions. The very uncharitable might accuse Meinrad Eberle and his colleagues of having an overactive imagination. They might say that it strains credibility that three 'spotters' on seeing the 'scoop of a lifetime' would all choose to pick up binoculars rather than cameras or video cameras, thereby ensuring that not one of them had any proof of having seen anything at all. Obviously once you have pictures or video, any sighting becomes far harder to discredit. But I would add that how one reacts on the spur of the moment is not necessarily governed by logic, and it's perhaps too easy to be wise in retrospect.

Others might question the accuracy of such an astonishingly detailed description of an aircraft seen from an admitted 25 miles away using binoculars with a magnification of only 15x. The photo of a B737 landing at Groom Lake gives a good idea of how much can actually be seen over such distances. If we accept that Meinrad and his chums could have seen that much detail from 25 miles using such relatively low-powered binoculars, some would maintain that the aircraft described does not quite ring true. It lacks the blending and area ruling that one would expect of a stealthy supersonic combat aircraft. Cynics would point out that it's all a bit too much like the Auroras supposedly sighted over the North Sea and frequently illustrated in *Popular Science* magazine and the various UFO-related publications.

Some might also criticise the artwork accompanying the article. Quite apart from its black paint (many expect that B-2 type dark grey is more likely) stark white US AIR FORCE (never U.S. AIR FORCE) titles are unheard of on front-line types. Some might also say that the red 'No step' warnings, skin corrugations and sharply chined cockpit are an evolution from the SR-71. Other features that don't ring quite

true to many of us are the underfuselage intakes, non area-rules fuselage and tiny jet nozzles making it look neither truly stealthy nor truly hypersonic. On the other hand, Meinrad saw the aircraft, and had an input in the artwork, so it does have the considerable benefit of being based on real eyewitness reports.

Some might also question why Groom Lake would launch one of their 'top-secret' birds in daylight, after seeing a bonfire on one of the nearby peaks. Is it credible that a deliberate leak would be managed by allowing three foreign spotters to see 'something'? The Groom Lake security people could not know that these 'spies' would not have provided themselves with really high-magnification binoculars (or a telescope trained on the runway) and could not know that they would be so thrown by seeing an unusual aircraft that they would not photograph it.

Some would also question whether the audio tape of scanned radio traffic actually proves much. The radio 'chat' recorded would not have referred to the secret programme, which would never have been broadcast 'in clear' without encryption. There is some talk about 'fast movers' but, as explained in the text, this is a standard US Air Force generic term for fast jet aircraft types. There is also some talk about aborting a mission due to a 'beacon failure' (probably TACAN) interesting only because ATC refers to another aircraft as 'same type' rather than using a designation, though I wouldn't read too much into that.

Others would question how likely it would be to see anything at Groom Lake, at all, since the base has become a very high-profile centre of attention for the 'Black airplane' and UFO watchers. Some informed sources suggest that most work on 'Black Programs' has transferred

to locations in the less glamorous White Sands Missile Range, and to a number of other locations.

But none of these counter arguments actually prove anything, and if we take Meinrad at his word, he certainly saw something. Meinrad Eberle provides a fascinating description of 'What Might Be' but unfortunately falls short of offering concrete proof. **JON LAKE**

In next month's Aircraft Illustrated we publish in-depth descriptions of how to get to the best viewing locations for Groom Lake, so perhaps an Aircraft Illustrated reader will come back with definitive photographic proof that there really is something out there, and will force the cynics to think again.

Next we hand over to **Chris Pocock**, a renowned voice on all things black (especially those which are Lockheed-built with a particularly long wing span!), for a comment on Meinrad's sighting. Chris has written extensively on reconnaissance in general, and Lockheed Skunk Works projects in particular. His new book on the early history of the U-2, 'Toward the Unknown', will be published on 1 May this year.

In his personal view, he finds it difficult to believe that there is a 'frontline' fully operational hypersonic aircraft out there, especially in the reconnaissance role, but has never ruled out the fact that such a craft might have flown as an experimental platform. That said, he believes Meinrad's sighting could be one of the firmest yet.

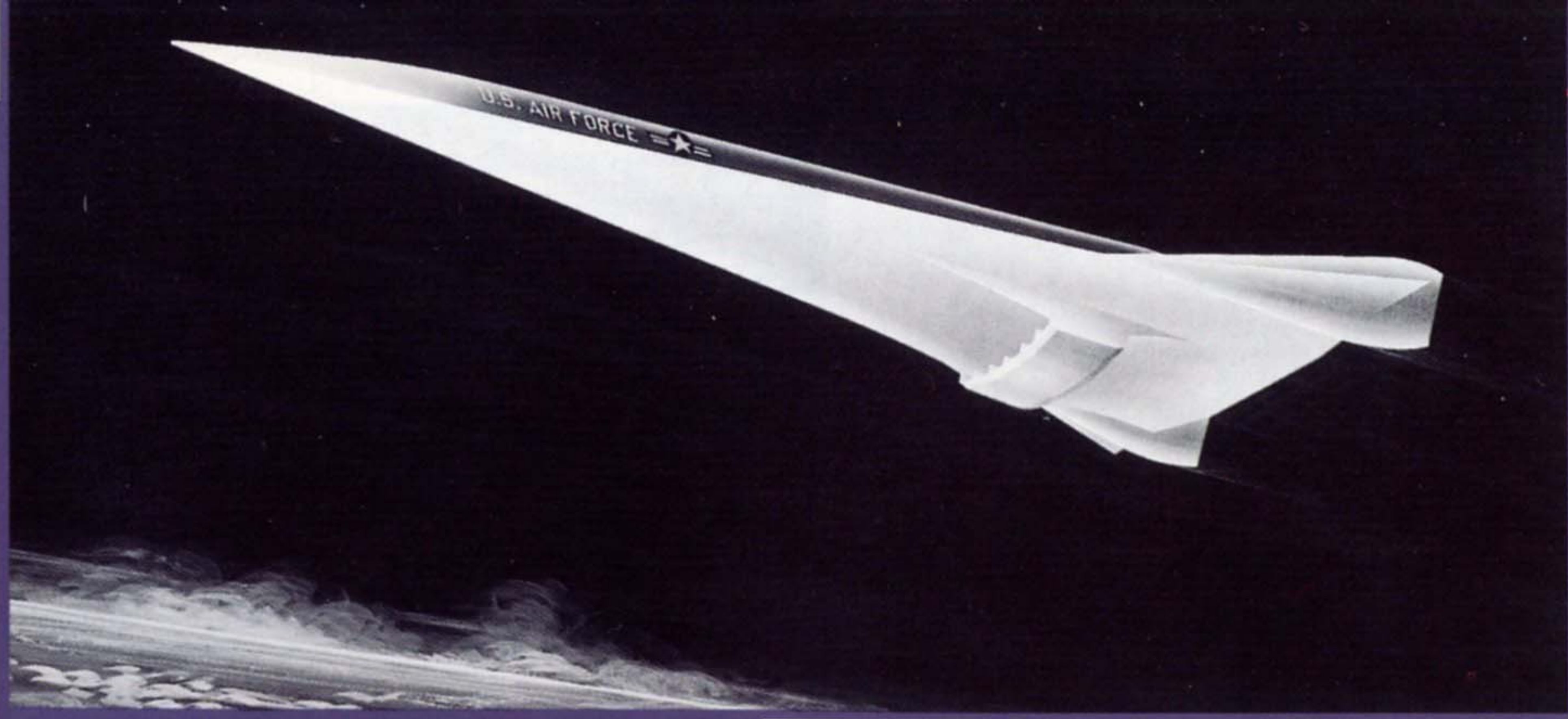
Big bucks

Whatever the exact nature of the latest 'black triangle' sighting, two things are certain. The US still spends big bucks on highly classified projects, and lots of people are still employed at Groom Lake.

I was in Las Vegas just days before Meinrad Eberle's group saw their 'fast mover' take off in September. I cruised past the unsigned compound at McCarran Airport to which base workers drive, before they embark on the fleet of Boeing 737s or Beech 1900s and fly off to the secret site. There are spaces for some 500

Four Boeings and a King Air — not much to the untrained eye, but these anonymous aircraft ferry countless employees to Groom Lake and other secret locations from Las Vegas' McCarran airport on a daily basis. The black triangle behind the aircraft is not a product of dreamland, but the famous Luxor Hotel of the Las Vegas strip! Meinrad 'Swiss Mountain Bat' Eberle





What could have been. A 1983 McDonnell Douglas concept of an advanced strategic reconnaissance aircraft which could fly at Mach 12 at more than 1,250 miles high (!), launching and recovering from a conventional runway. At the time MDC said that such an aircraft 'could become a reality in the 21st Century if the necessary technology readiness programmes are pursued by the US Government'. One of the biggest studies was the NASP project, which had its plug pulled in 1993 after a massive expenditure with little to show. Did the 'Black' world adopt such studies? *via Chris Pocock*

vehicles — and the compound was nearly full.

Of all the US black-budget aircraft that have been postulated in the last decade, the idea of a vehicle designed for conventional take-off and landing, yet able to cruise at a high Mach number at the edge of space, has attracted the most attention. Not only because the technology is difficult, exotic and expensive, but also because enthusiasts of secret aircraft have perceived a clear requirement for such a craft. Most notably, as a replacement for the grounded SR-71 Blackbird spyplane.

Decades of aeronautical research indicate that the isosceles triangle shape, with approximately 75-degree wing sweep and a blended wing/body, is the way to go hypersonic (e.g. beyond Mach 5). From the aborted X-20 Dynasoar and X-24B in the 1970s, through the Trans-Atmospheric Vehicle (TAV) studies and on to the X-30 National Aerospaceplane (NASP) project 10 years ago, the signposts all point in the same direction. But the big, unsolved issue has always been propulsion. By common consent, the Blackbird took the conventional turbojet as far as it could go; at Mach 3, the J58 virtually operated as a ramjet, some say. To go hypersonic, ramjets, rockets and scramjets or combinations thereof are mandatory — unless new concepts such as combined-cycles, pulse detonation waves or aerospike can be fully developed.

If the black world has solved the problem of trans-atmospheric propulsion, it would be a huge technical achievement and a huge scandal at the same time. Why? Because countless millions of US government dollars have been spent in the 'white world' on developing hypersonic solutions (see future issue). Since the NASP was abandoned in 1993 after \$2 billion had been spent, there have been a succession of programmes: Hyper-X at NASA, the US Air Force's HySTP and HyTech, the US Air Force/NASA LoFlyte, etc, etc. If you add the true spaceplane projects such as NASA's X-33 VentureStar and the US Air Force's Space Maneuver Vehicle (SMV)... the list gets even longer.

Yet the fast triangles are 'out there', along with the unexplained sonic booms. At the very least, there must be an experimental hypersonic vehicle in the black world. Perhaps a vehicle that has taken the Air TurboRamjet (ATR) means of propulsion just as far as it can go (Mach 6)?

From some viewing angles, such an aircraft's large inlets would be hidden from view beneath the fuselage. Together with the exhaust nozzles, they would be integrated into the fuselage, which itself would blend into the wing for large-volume fuel carriage and the most efficient means of heat-sinking.

And what of the need? Has a secret new spyplane gone operational? I have strong doubts. I understand that the US *did* spend \$1 billion in the early 1990s, trying to develop a successor to the SR-71 in secret. But that effort, led by the Lockheed Skunk Works, was for a *subsonic*, high-payload, high-altitude and long-endurance vehicle. The so-called 'Q-plane' had manned and unmanned options; it was cancelled with very little to show, other than some wing technology which filtered-down to the substitute UAV. Then that, too, was cancelled because of cost overruns. With such programmatic confusion and waste going on, no wonder Congressional leaders lost patience and fought the US Air Force to bring back the Blackbird! I don't rule out a new, classified effort to produce a penetrating reconnaissance aircraft to complement the spy satellites, the U-2 and the Global Hawk. Such a programme could take up the work already done to produce a secret high-Mach vehicle, if they want to revisit supersonic air-breathing recce.

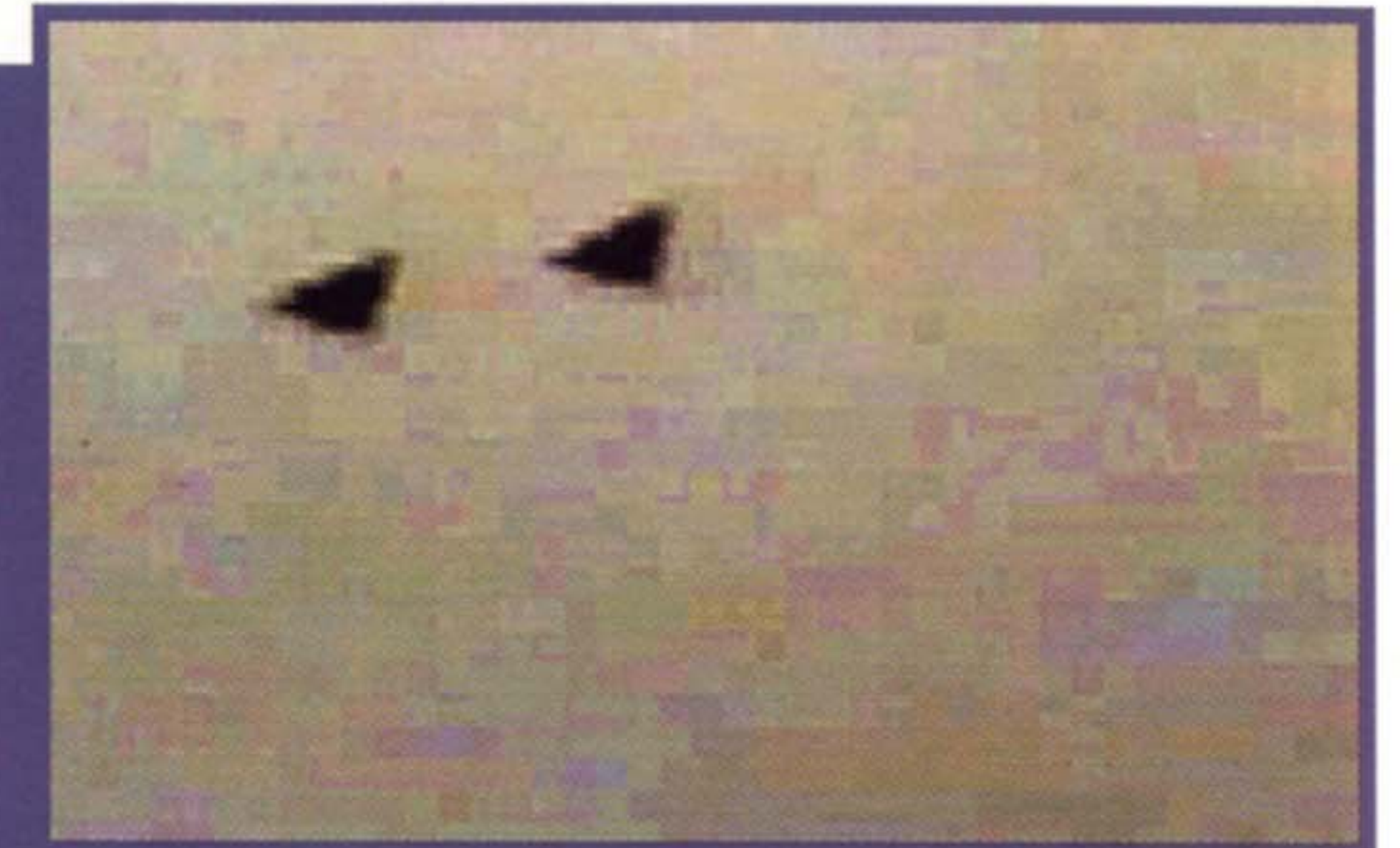
But what does that leave as the purpose for a secret high-Mach vehicle that is already flying? Long-range, invulnerable strike? Anti-satellite weapon launcher? Even secret satellite launcher? More scandal again, if the vehicle is operational, since the US is constrained by international treaty from some potential applications in these mission areas. The reports of black triangles over the North Sea and other non-US locations have led some to conclude that these machines are now in 'regular service'. But I suspect that the secret high-Mach efforts remain experimental or, at the most, in some kind of holding pattern from which their development and deployment could be accelerated to meet some future contingency.

Whether that is a good use of taxpayer's dollars is another matter! **CHRIS POCOCK**

Having taken off his 'devil's advocate' hat, we now hand back over to Jon Lake to cast an analytical eye over the whole event and Black programmes in general.

Is there anything out there?

The entire subject of secret 'Black aircraft programmes', Area 51 and Dreamland has become inextricably bound up with that of UFOs and of supposed US government testing of 'captured alien technologies'. The debate has sometimes been hi-jacked by conspiracy theorists and (I don't want to be offensive here, but I can think of no better way of describing them) those happy eccentrics whose grasp on reason may be distorted by their eagerness to prove the existence of extra-terrestrial life and activity.



A picture says a thousand words. These two flying triangles, caught on camera by Steve Douglass, have caused some hot debate since their arrival on the *AI* desk. Some say the aircraft, which are flying down the page (rather than coming towards the photographer), could be conclusive proof of a Black Project, while others believe them to be no more than conventional aircraft with their wings swept back. The photographer himself has an open mind either way. The pair was caught in 1997 flying very close to the Chisum Vortac (now called Climax), six miles west of Roswell, New Mexico. The call-sign used was 'Zoltar Flight' and their engines had an interesting hollow sound to them, though they were not very loud. *Steve Douglass*

So let me say from the start that when I pose the question 'Is there anything out there?' I am not referring to aliens, flying saucers or little green men — I'm referring to top secret US government aircraft programmes, manned or unmanned. And major programmes can exist in secret, at least in theory. They have certainly existed in the past. One only has to look back to the F-117A Stealth Fighter, whose very existence was secret from the Have Blue Phase Two programme launch in 1975. It remained secret through flight testing of the two sub-scale Have Blue XST demonstrators in 1977-78, through flight testing of the Senior Trend YF-117As from 18 July 1981 and even through full operational deployment of some 20 aircraft with the 4,450th Tactical Group at Tonopah in 1983. The existence of the F-117A was not

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Left: Developed in secret, this is the first Have Blue XST, photographed at Lockheed's Burbank facility before it was delivered in total secrecy to Groom Lake on 16 November 1977 for the start of its flight test programme. *via Chris Pocock*



Left: Catching many observers unaware, the existence of Northrop's Tacit Blue was declassified in 1996. The aircraft demonstrated the manufacturer's 'seamless stealth design technology', as later used on the B-2 bomber. This stealthy battlefield reconnaissance and surveillance aircraft had taken to the skies over Groom Lake some 11 years before it was declassified. *via Chris Pocock*

Below left: The existence of the F-117 Nighthawk was kept 'in the Black' until 10 November 1988. By this time nearly 50 aircraft were operating out of Tonopah, Nv, proving back then it was possible to develop and deploy such an aircraft in complete secrecy. *via Chris Pocock*

formally admitted until 10 November 1988, by which time nearly 50 were operational, proving that it is quite possible to design, develop, build and deploy a combat aircraft in near-total secrecy — a so-called 'Black programme'.

The aircraft's existence had been explicitly denied on numerous occasions, and when the programme did ease into the 'Grey World', there were categorical assurances that there were no other similar Black programmes. Until, that is, the 1991 Gulf War revealed the existence of a new conventionally armed air-launched cruise missile, or until 1996, when it was quietly announced that Northrop had designed, developed and tested the Tacit Blue. This stealthy battlefield reconnaissance and surveillance aircraft was first flown in 1985, some 11 years before. There can be little surprise that subsequent US Air Force and government denials of further 'Black programmes' have been greeted with some cynicism.

It would be tempting to think that the F-117A were not the only such programmes and many might ask whether what Meinrad and his colleagues saw was the result of another, similar, 'Black aircraft programme'?

There have certainly been many sightings of mysterious shapes airborne over and near Dreamland and other sensitive parts of the

south-western USA, including the massive White Sands ranges. This is hardly surprising, since the south-western states of Arizona, Nevada and New Mexico include vast and inaccessible range areas, with airfields whose existence has sometimes been a secret, and which are sometimes accessible only by aircraft, while being located in the middle of restricted airspace. Even some of the US Air Force's admitted facilities in the area are huge, with sufficient space and accommodation to be able to house Black programmes. Many believe that bases like Holloman, Cannon or Nellis could house their own 'Black programmes', if these were flown only at night. A large number of the sightings of 'Black Airplanes' were reported and illustrated in the respected and prestigious *Aviation Week and Space Technology* until, according to legend, that magazine's editor was warned to steer clear of the subject.

Some believed that the very fact that the F-117A's existence had been revealed meant that there was probably another secret aircraft 'out there' that had taken over its original planned 'Silver Bullet' role, providing a strike weapon which could be used and then 'plausibly denied' by the USA. Similar arguments suggested that the SR-71 must have been replaced by a 'Black World' hypersonic reconnaissance platform, and that yet another 'Black airplane' was fulfilling a tactical recce and laser designation role.

The most convincing of these rumoured 'Black airplanes' are detailed in the boxes which accompany this article.

But not everybody believes that another Black Programme could exist. One prominent Washington analyst pointed out that even when the F-117A was flying in secret, there was no doubt that there was 'something out there', and that a wide range of 'Black' programmes (not all of them aircraft) were being funded. At the time, there were strong rumours that a stealthy fighter-bomber (often referred to as the F-19) was operational from Tonopah, although no-one seemed to know what it looked like. But that, pointed out my distinguished source, was at the height of the Reagan years, when Cold War secrecy was still endemic and entirely taken for granted, and when no-one asked too many questions about where money earmarked for the Department of Defense might be headed.

Things, he said, are very different today, with much tighter control of the military budget, and with Congress demanding and getting a much greater degree of accountability and explanation. And if the military now turned around and said, 'Oh yes, and we've got an aircraft that cost umpty-ump zillion dollars to develop, and we haven't told you guys anything about it' then the impact on the F-22 funding debate could be catastrophic — even if the newly-revealed 'Black' programme could be presented as having been a text-book case of smart procurement and cost savings.

On the other hand, other analysts believe that billions of dollars continue to be poured into 'Black' R&D programmes with the US Air Force due to be spending \$4.96bn on classified research programmes during FY2001. There are Acknowledged Special Access Programs whose existence is known, but which are highly classified and protected, but there are also said to be Unacknowledged Special Access Programs whose very existence is secret, including some in which normal congressional sub-committee oversight is 'waived'. When the F-117 programme was still an Unacknowledged SAP, even the commander of the US Air Force's Systems Division remained in ignorance of the programme for which he was nominally responsible.

Interestingly, the US Air Force has reserved the designations X-39 to X-42 for a variety of programmes, with the X-40, for example, applying to a military Miniature Space Vehicle Technology demonstrator.

The question remains. 'Is there anything out there?'

Things that go whoosh in the night

What exactly is out there? What is behind the hangar doors at Area 51? Flying triangles, Artichokes, Pumpkin Seeds, Senior Citizens and Black Mantas? Perhaps we'll never know. Even if just half of the rumoured projects 'went public' in the future, there would still be designs that have flown as prototypes, proof of concepts or technology demonstrators that will never see the public light of day.

Some years ago, reports quoted an apparent Groom Lake source as saying 'We are currently test-flying vehicles that defy description'... Real life X-Files that will remain shrouded in the darkness of the deep, deep Black world. The stuff dreams are made of.

Over the years there have been an almost countless number of rumoured Black projects, some plausible, some totally improbable. **Jon Lake** provides a run-down of the most convincing of these, with exclusive illustrations by **John Weal**.

A-12

The General Dynamics/McDonnell Douglas A-12 Avenger II was designed as a carrier-borne all-weather attack aircraft to replace the A-6, and was a stealthy, two-man, tandem seat triangular flying wing design. Built in mock-up form, the A-12 was cancelled in January 1991, before any prototype could be constructed, due to delays and cost overruns. Claimed to be 'stealthier than an F-117A' the A-12 may have been preceded by a 'Black-world' sub-scale aerodynamic/concept demonstrator and this aircraft may account for some of the sightings of secret triangular 'Black Airplanes'.

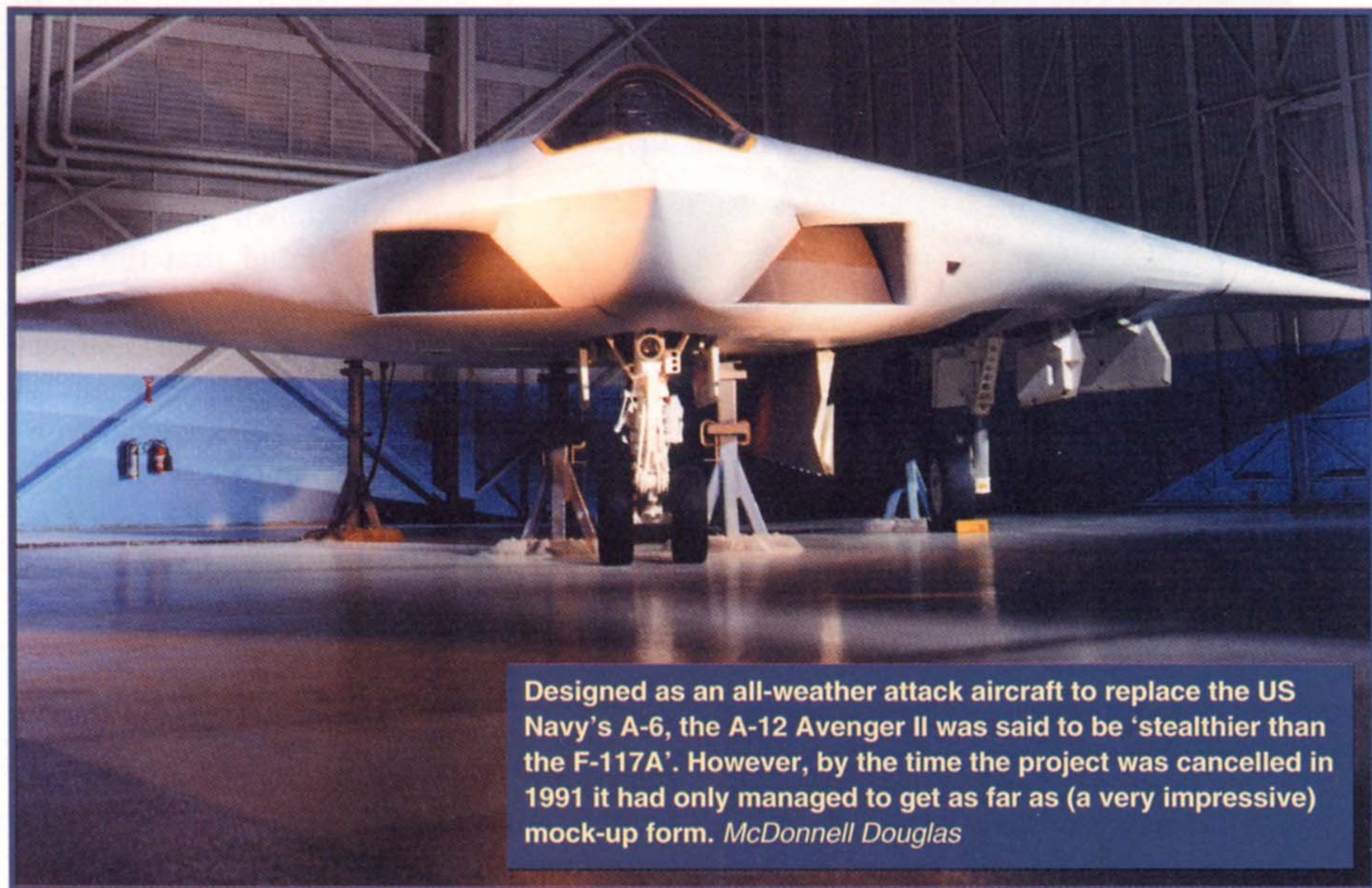
A-17

After the various 'Auroras' had been thoroughly discredited, reports began to emerge of a smaller, slower aeroplane which was described by some as a cross between the F-111 and the YF-23, a swing-winged aircraft said to be intended as F-111 replacements and due to be based at Cannon AFB, New Mexico. An A-17 was 'sighted' over Amarillo in 1994, and the 'North Sea' Aurora was retrospectively claimed to have been an A-17 with its wings swept back. The crash of a 'US stealth aircraft' at Boscombe Down was also said by some to have involved an A-17. The A-17 has gained little credence, not least because the F-111 had been adequately replaced by the F-15E and conventionally-rolled B-1Bs, while no-one has really explained why an F-111 replacement should need to be a 'Black World', top-secret programme, any more than the A-12 Avenger II, YF-22 or B-2, which were all openly acknowledged. 'Evidence' offered in support of the swing-wing A-17 (which may be designated STF or Stealth Tactical Fighter according to some sources) includes the construction of facilities at Cannon AFB, which reportedly include a RAM application building, irrele-



Above: There is a strong rumour that Northrop Grumman has flown a stealthy swing-wing attack aircraft, possibly as an offshoot of its failed YF-23, and that it is about to be declassified. Often dubbed the A-17 and 'Switchblade', the aircraft has been 'eyeballed' on a number of occasions in the US, including Amarillo, Tx and Cannon AFB, NM. *Steve Douglass*

Right and below: These two patches are said to be worn by crews of the 'Switchblade'. The Latin apparently reads something like 'Out of the night, the intruders come' at the top, and 'Secret Class' at the bottom.



Designed as an all-weather attack aircraft to replace the US Navy's A-6, the A-12 Avenger II was said to be 'stealthier than the F-117A'. However, by the time the project was cancelled in 1991 it had only managed to get as far as (a very impressive) mock-up form. *McDonnell Douglas*

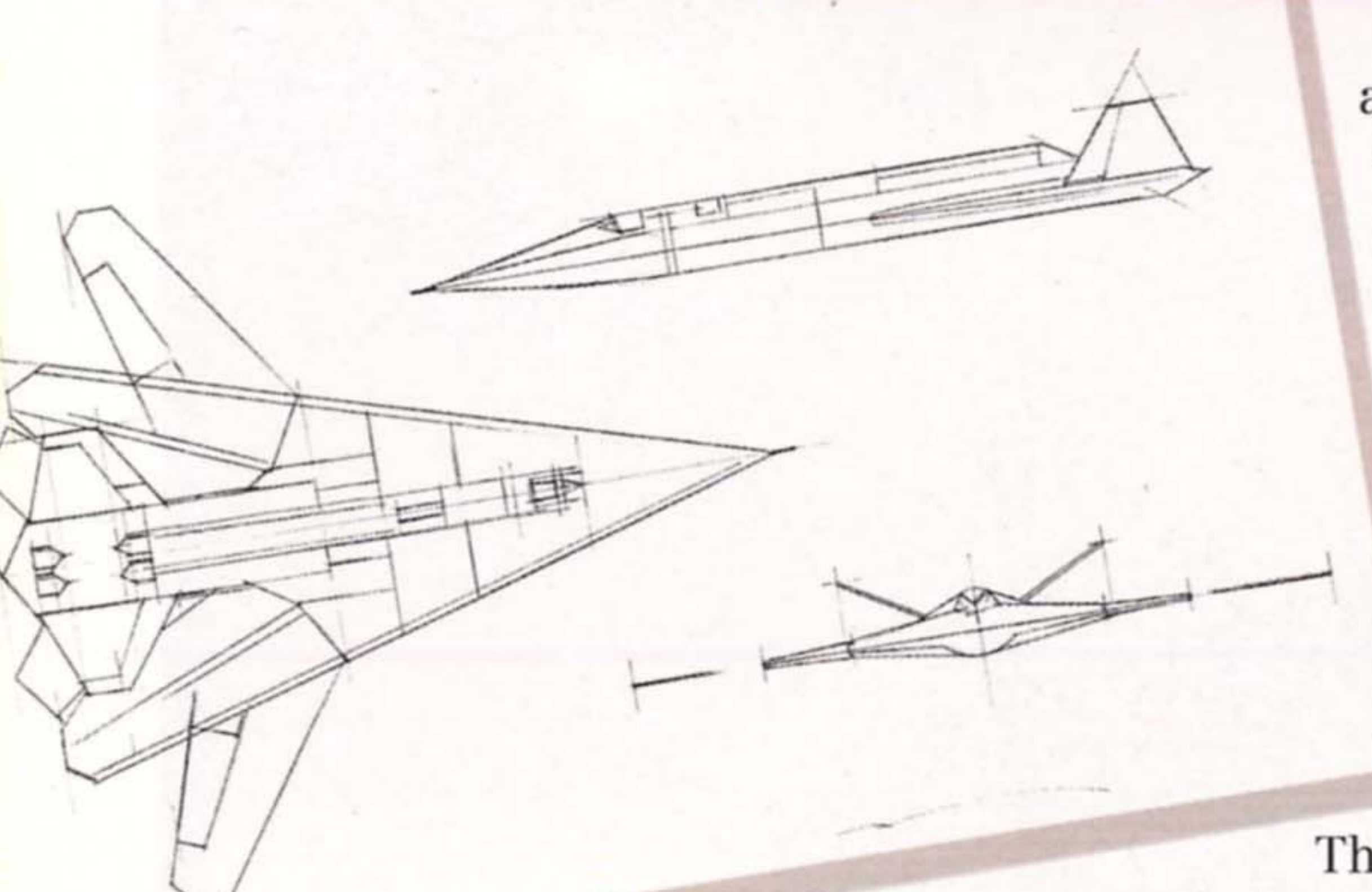
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Above:
via Steve Douglass



Right: Simon Gray

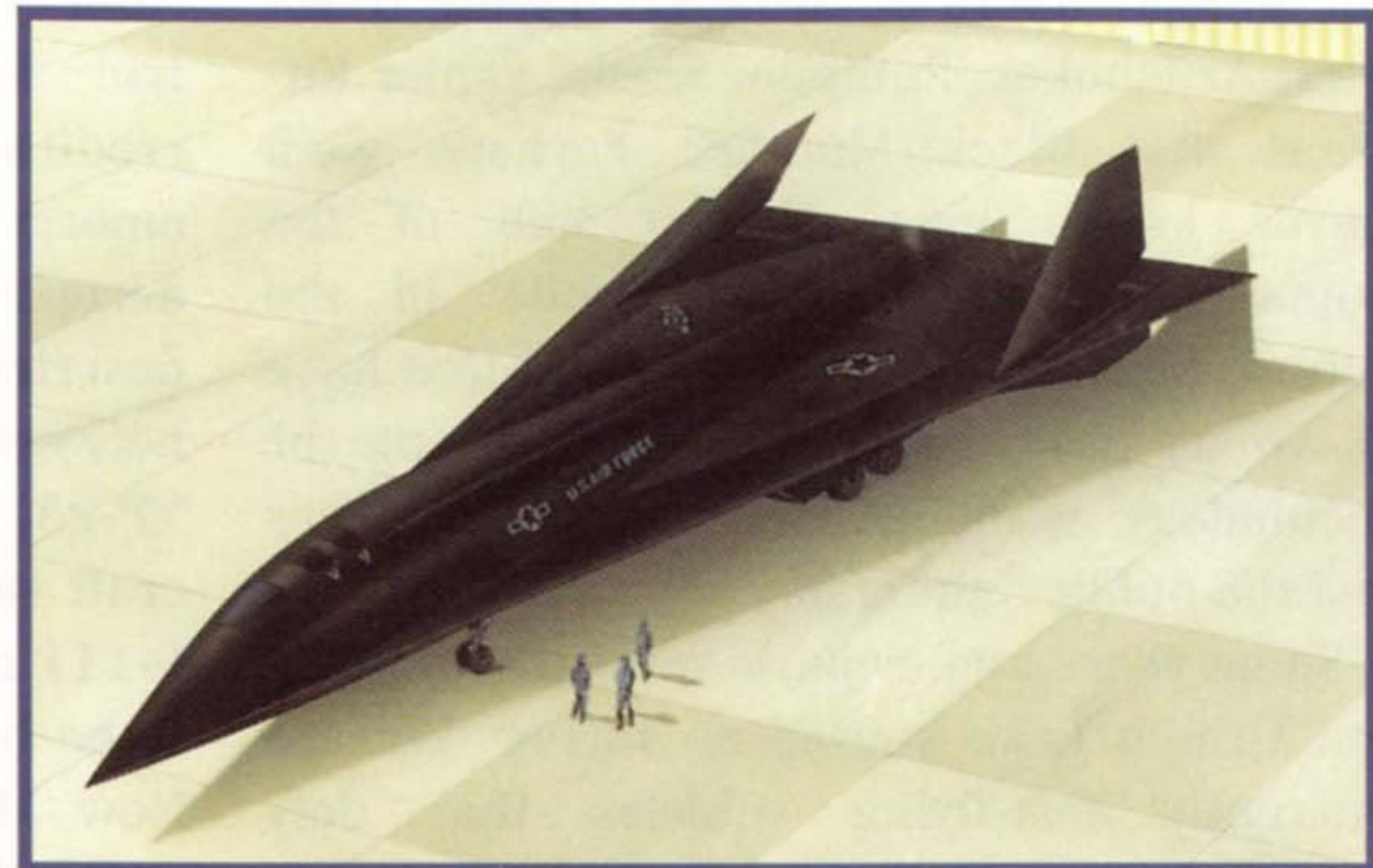


'covert reconnaissance aircraft in the classified world'. The buffs have taken this as indicating that this was a manned aircraft 'under development if not actually in service' possibly serving as a 'companion to the U-2'. They have speculated that the type carries the U-2R's SYERS and ASARS sensors, as well as the Joint SIGINT Avionics Family sensor suite. Some suggest that the aircraft is twin-engines with a two-man crew — using LO technology to penetrate enemy airspace. But the terrible shortage of reconnaissance product in 'Desert Storm' and more recently in the Balkans would tend to suggest that the US Air Force has no more recce platforms than have already been admitted. If the 'Special Platform' is a reconnaissance aircraft, and if it is in service, then it doesn't seem to be doing much!

a single triangular 'Black Airplane' whose saw-cut trailing edge was wrongly interpreted — perhaps the aircraft recently seen at Groom Lake? Others suggest that the Artichoke has never existed as any more than an RCS range model.

AURORA

The name Aurora has been applied to various supposed 'Black World' aircraft, most of them very high speed (Mach 4.5 to Mach 8)



ARTICHOKE

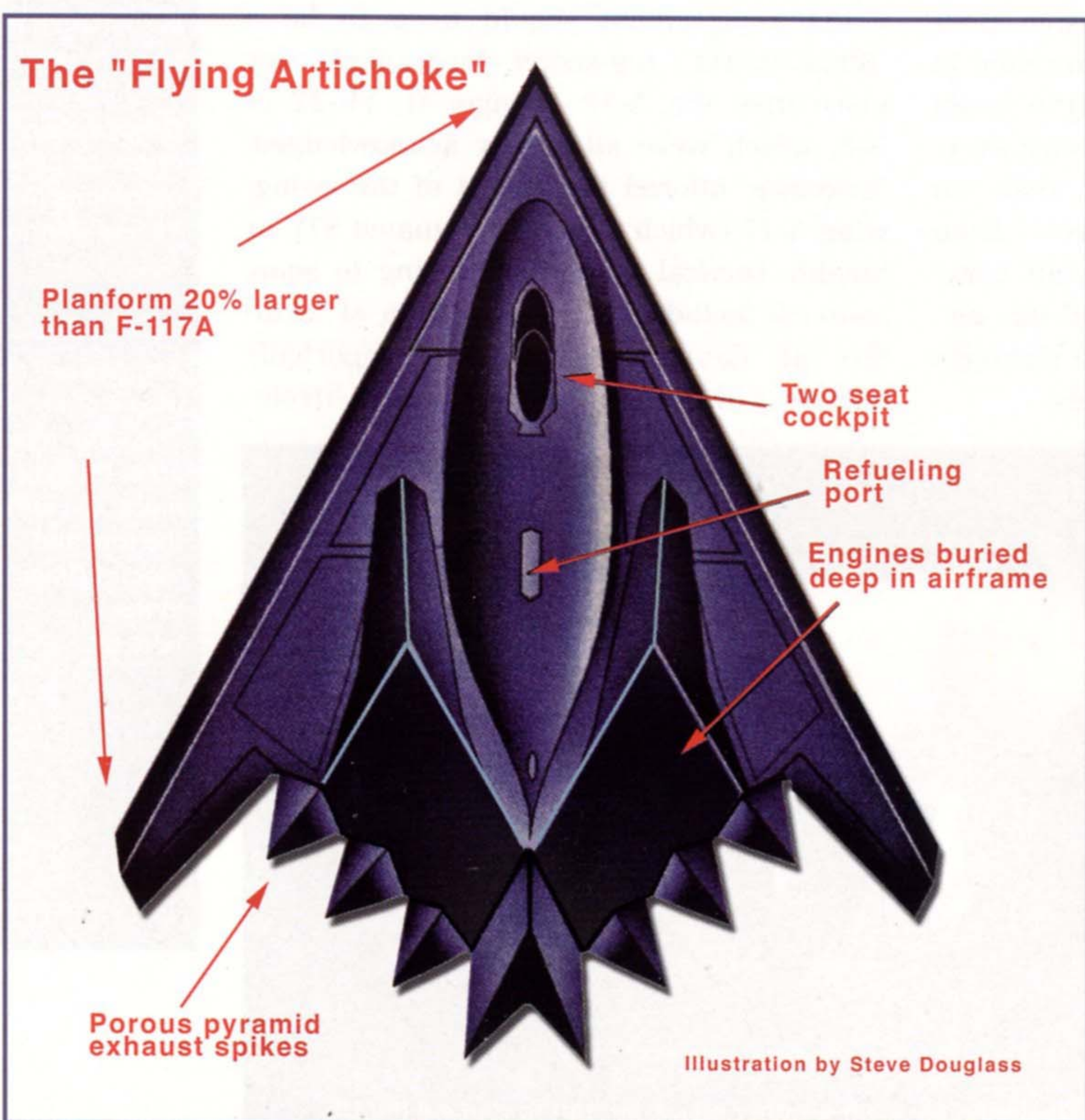
The aircraft dubbed 'Artichoke' by the 'Black Airplane' spotting fraternity is understood to look like a 20% scaled-up F-117A, but with an unusual after-body with artichoke-like spikes (possibly for noise reduction) and with a two-man crew and an increased bombload. Rumours suggest that the 'Artichoke' was preceded by a sub-scale aerodynamic test bed. Some believe that the 'Artichoke' represents a mis-identification of

reconnaissance platforms developed to replace the SR-71 Blackbird. The US Air Force's continuing 'recce gap' might lead one to suspect either that the aircraft is a figment of people's imaginations or that the programme has failed to deliver the promised results. Reports of unusual engine sounds ('like the sky ripping apart' or 'like a constant explosion', and sometimes with a 1Hz or 2Hz pulsing sound) are generally attributed to the Aurora, whose engine note is variously described as a low rumble or even as a series of explosions. It has been compared to the sound of a Saturn V rocket on launch.

vant to the openly based F-16s. Another mystery is why any stealthy attack aircraft would need to feature variable-geometry wings — unless expected to operate from an aircraft carrier like the swing-wing NATF. Runway lengths are unlikely to be a problem for an aircraft in this class, while low speed controllability issues could be addressed through a sophisticated modern FBW flight control system, which a stealthy aircraft would almost certainly need anyway. Some reports have suggested that the aircraft actually used folding outer wing panels, which drop to the vertical (or fold up to the vertical) to act as endplate fins. Alternatively the A-17 may be a mis-identification of a different triangular 'Black Airplane', probably with a saw-cut trailing edge — perhaps the aircraft recently seen at Groom Lake?

THE 'AIR FORCE SPECIAL PLATFORM'

The 1997 Defense Airborne Reconnaissance Office's 1997 report on UAVs referred to the 'U-2 and the Air Force Special Platform' in a footnote. DARO director Maj Gen Kenneth Israel is quoted (on the ever-reliable Internet!) as describing this as referring to a



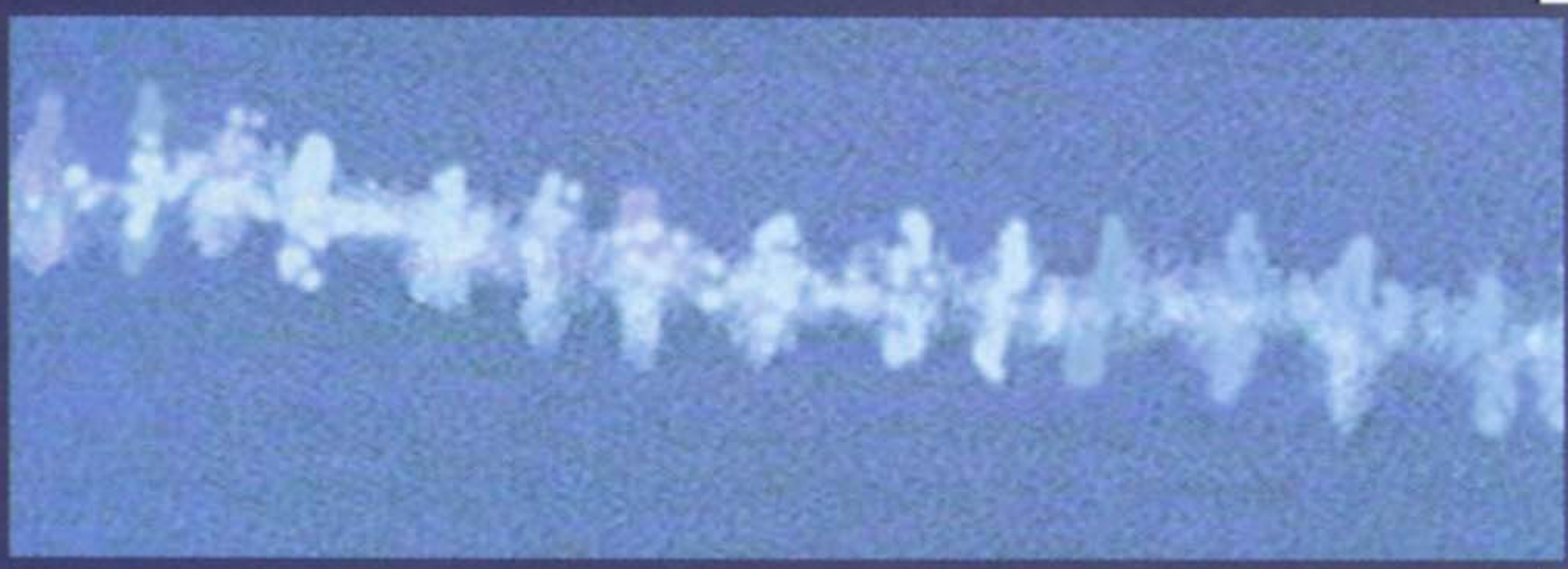
The 'Artichoke' has been described by a number of witnesses as a 'scaled up F-117', with a highly unusual rear section/tail configuration — possibly to suppress engine noise. Steve Douglass

Lockheed's Skunk Works almost certainly conducted paper studies into a Mach 4 Ramjet-powered recce aircraft (operating at 200,000 ft) in the late 1970s, and into an even more ambitious Mach 7, 250,000 ft Scramjet powered aircraft. Both were reportedly similar in configuration to NASA's X-24B lifting body. In 1988 *Armed Forces Journal* published an analysis suggesting that Lockheed's income far exceeded that from all known programmes, and speculated that the 'hidden' disparity represented income from the super-stealth SR-71 replacement. A line under Strategic Reconnaissance in the DoD's 1985 Budget Document allocated \$80.1m in FY81 and \$2.272bn in FY 87 to the 'Aurora'. Conclusions were drawn from this to the effect that the supposed high speed

recce aircraft was a Lockheed product named Aurora. I'll spoil the story by revealing that Lockheed's Ben Rich later

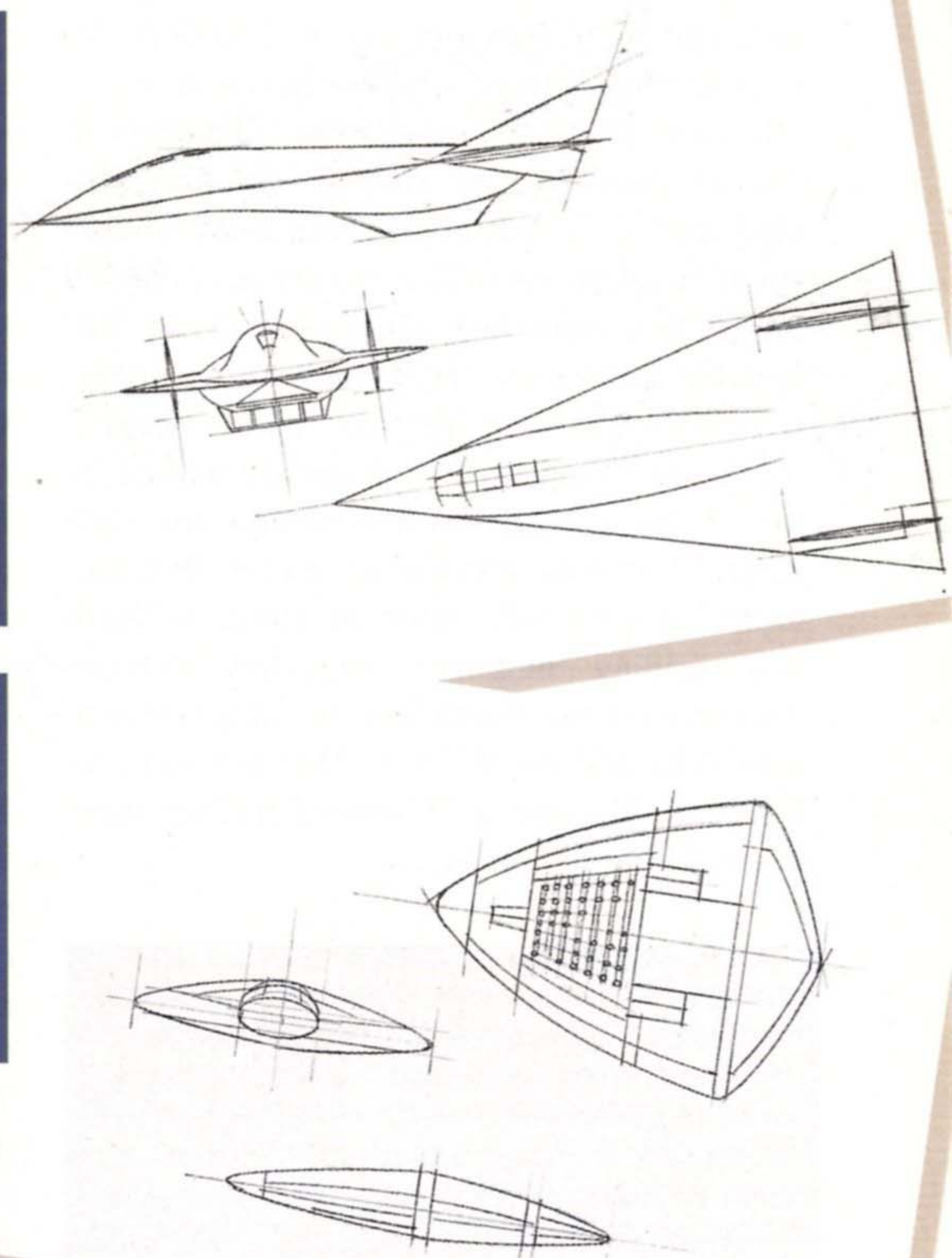


Above: The famous 'doughnuts on a rope' contrails, caught by Steve Douglass over Amarillo, Tx, in 1992, and said to have been produced by 'Aurora'. The aircraft was travelling at such a speed that by the time Steve had got his camera, it had long gone. Such a distinctive trial



would be produced by a Pulse Detonation Wave Engine (PDWE), which if the technology has been mastered, would power an aircraft to hypersonic speeds. Steve Douglass

Above right: Incredibly, the 'pulser' was photographed again on 13 December 1999. Steve Douglass was filling up with gas in Amarillo at about 15.30hrs when he heard the classic rumble, looked up to see the aircraft glint as it raced across the sky, travelling from due west to east. He grabbed his camera and shot this image, but the craft had long gone over the horizon. It took about four minutes for the aircraft to cross the entire sky. Steve Douglass



w e a p o n s

through ports in the underside.

This blunt-cornered diamond-shaped aircraft has been dubbed the Pumpkin Seed by some observers.

Throughout the early nineties, Aurora (now also reported as 'Senior Citizen', though this designation was actually used by a STOL Hercules intended to rescue hostages from Iran) was reported to have visited or over-flown Macrahanish in Scotland on a number of occasions. On one such occasion in late 1991, an RAF ATC officer rang Macrahanish to ask what he'd just seen flying near the base, accelerating to Mach 3. He was supposedly told to 'forget what he'd seen'.

The speculation was that Aurora was flying missions from Groom Lake to Kwajalein Atoll, before flying recce runs over Iraq using 'powerful IR radar and cameras'. It then refuelled from UK-based tankers, shadowed by F-111s that were there to 'confuse radar'. Sightings were also made near Beale AFB, and there were reports that the aircraft might be powered by a pulse detonation wave engine, explaining the pulsating explosive sound associated with the aircraft. In 1992, a photographer in Amarillo (Steve Douglass) recorded on film an unusual 'doughnuts-on-a-rope' contrail, and in the same year a radio ham monitored traffic between Edwards AFB and an aircraft call-sign 'Gaspip' which reported being at 67,000ft, 81 miles

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AREA
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 AUTHORIZED

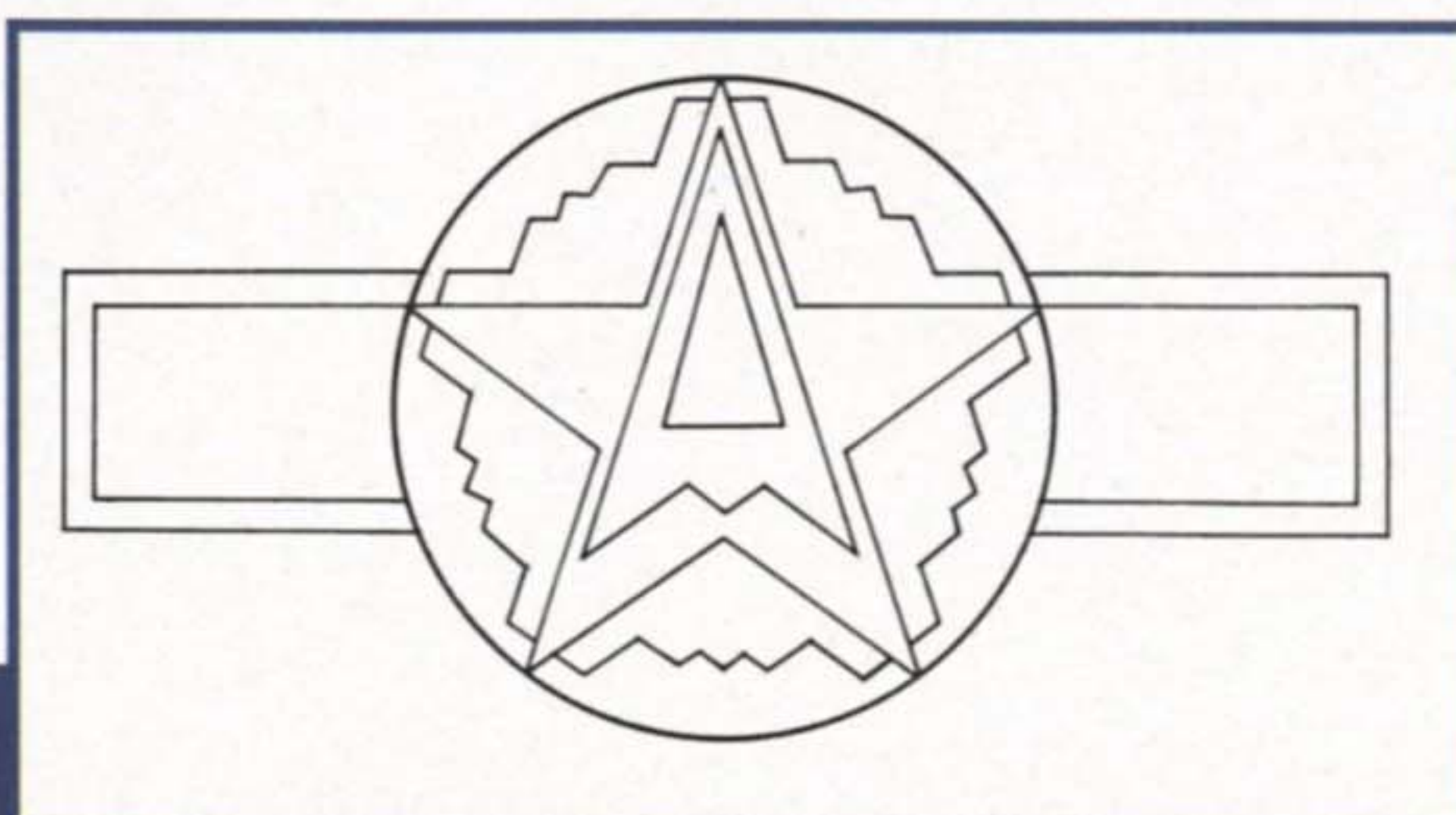
SR-75 PENETRATOR WITH XR-7 THUNDERDART



1:72 SCALE
 ECHELLE
 MODEL KIT / MODELE RÉDUIT
 No 034

Another 'Aurora' configuration was this 'Mothership' design, produced in kitform by Italeri/Testors. The 'SR-75 Penetrator' in this case carries the hypersonic 'XR-7 Thunderdart' to altitude, before releasing it and returning to its secret base. The 'Mothership' configuration was born from a number of eyewitness reports of an aircraft of similar size and shape to the XB-70 Valkyrie bomber.

Speculative articles described a flattened diamond shaped aircraft (close in planform to Lockheed's 'Hopeless Diamond' optimum low RCS shape) about 100ft long by 60ft in span, black, covered in scorched ceramic tiles and using external burning in the supersonic cruise regime, using the aircraft's shock wave as a 'nozzle' to contain and direct the flow of burned gases. The aircraft was said to be an unmanned nuclear bomber, able to eject up to 121 nuclear



This is the patch worn by crews of the 'Aurora', as described by sources that have seen it.

out, and then 70 miles out at 36,000ft. No U-2s or SR-71s were airborne at the time.

In late 1990 and mid 1992, sightings of Aurora described an aircraft which resembled the XB-70, with blunt chines on the forward fuselage, (possibly retractable) canard foreplanes, upturned wingtips forming fins, and black tiles covering the leading edges, with the rest of the airframe painted white. All Aurora stories were explicitly denied by the US Air Force, who denied that any such aircraft was in service or under development. Despite this, later in 1992, a North Sea drilling engineer reported another Aurora over the North Sea, in company with a KC-135 and two F-111s. This aircraft was F-111 sized, with a 75°-swept trailing edge and a triangular shape.

Behind the hypersonic reconnaissance aircraft, the Northrop Grumman TR-3 'Manta' is perhaps the next most intriguing secret yet to be given up by the Black world. Supposedly designed as a battlefield surveillance/reconnaissance platform, the aircraft also has a number of configurations — one of which is a scaled down B-2 Spirit.

Exclusive artwork by John Weal

Many Aurora 'sightings' were made by those closely associated with 'UFology', including Bob Lazar, who also claimed to have seen nine captured UFOs, John Lear, who claimed that aliens (operating from an underground base at Groom Lake) were being fed cattle organs and parts of missing children and by another bright spark who claimed to have invented a cure for cancer. Some claim that Aurora actually incorporates 'alien technology'. Finally, people began to realise that Stealth and Hypersonic speed were mutually exclusive, and Aurora became thoroughly discredited.

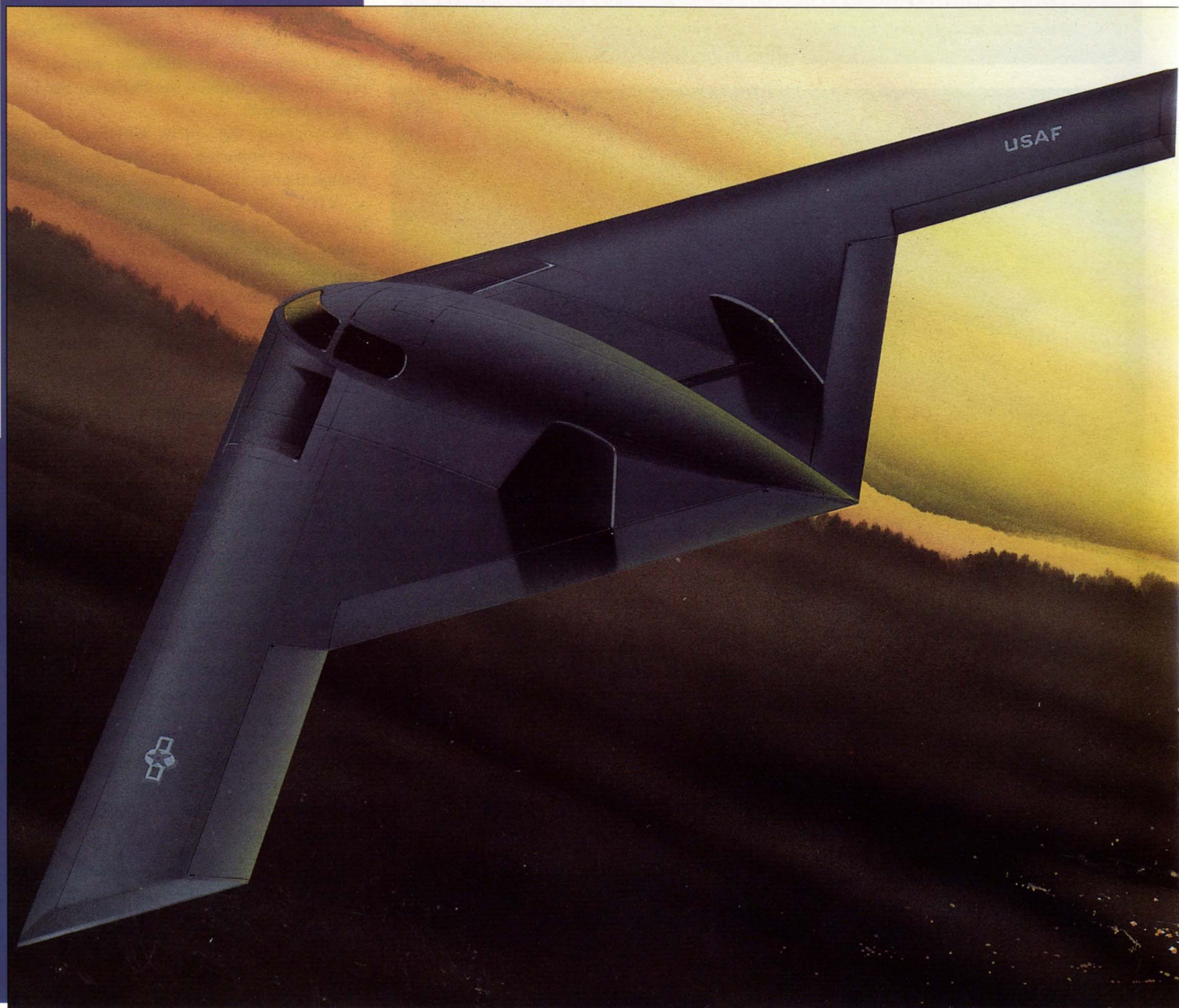
F-121

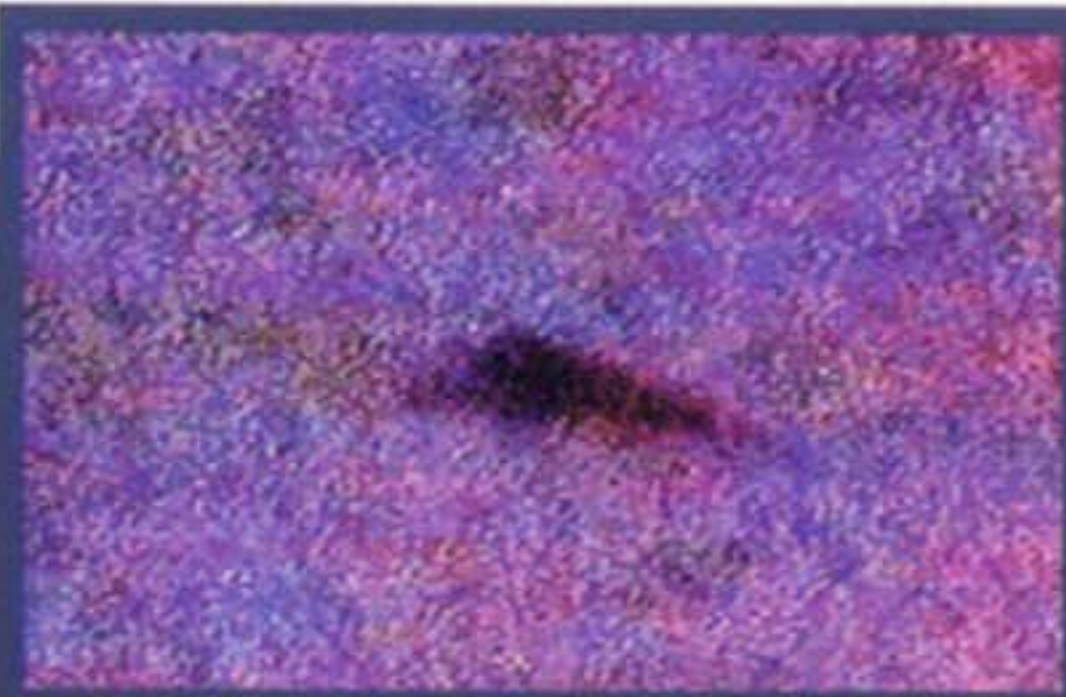
The Northrop F-121 Sentinel has been described as a VTOL Pyramid-shaped aircraft with a dome-shaped nozzle in the triangular underside. The aircraft supposedly took off from bunkers at Northrop's Tehachapi RCS facility. Some sources suggest that the F-121 had an 'anti-gravity motor' putting it firmly into the realms of the UFologists.

TR-3A MANTA

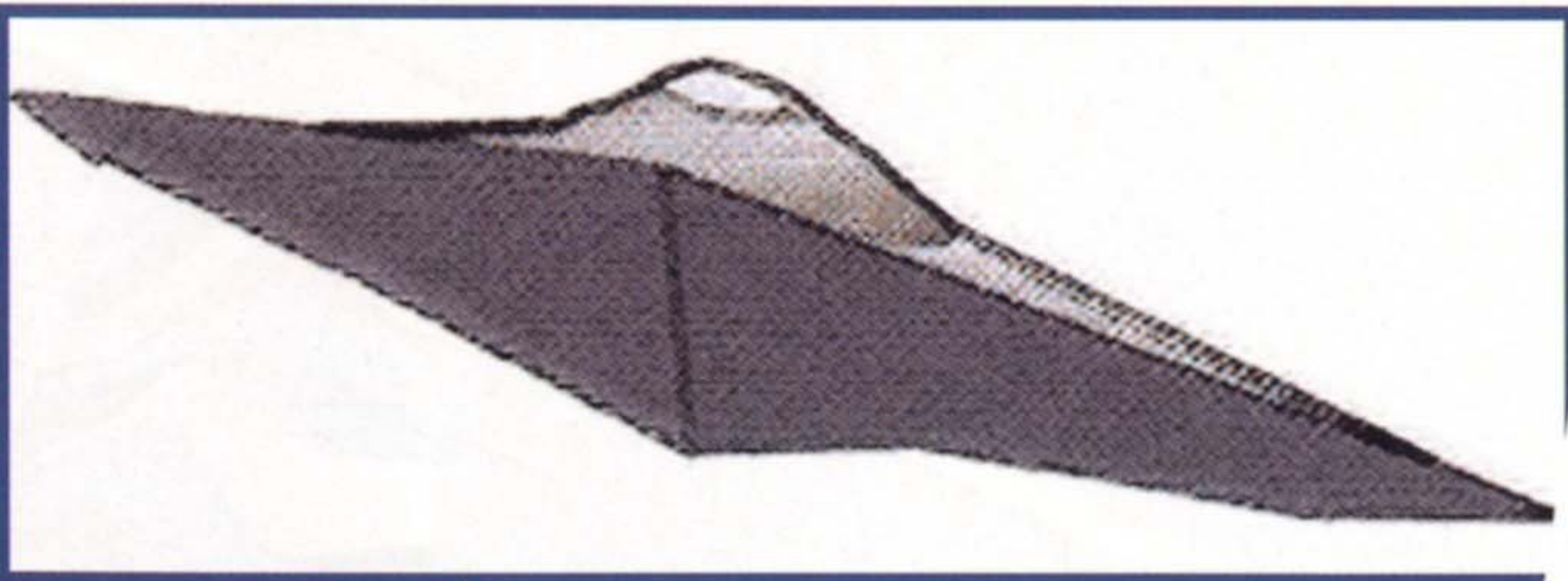
The conventional wisdom is that after losing out to Lockheed in the Have Blue programme, Northrop was given the 'consolation prize' of developing a stealthy reconnaissance aircraft to meet the US Air Force's THAP (Tactical High Altitude Penetrator) requirement. In fact, this was very nearly true, though the requirement for which Northrop produced such an aircraft was DARPA's BSAX (Battlefield Surveillance Aircraft-Experimental). This was part of the Assault Breaker project, which aimed to stop any Warsaw Pact tank attack using PGMs, and which relied on using a stealthy radar reconnaissance aircraft (something of a contradiction in terms) loitering over the battlefield. This resulted in what Northrop called the Whale, what other aircraft companies and enthusiasts called Shamu (see later) and what the DoD called Tacit Blue.

Northrop's THAP contender was assumed to have been developed from its unbuilt (but pole-tested) Have Blue design, with some family resemblance to the B-2. The Northrop Have Blue had been a basic (but

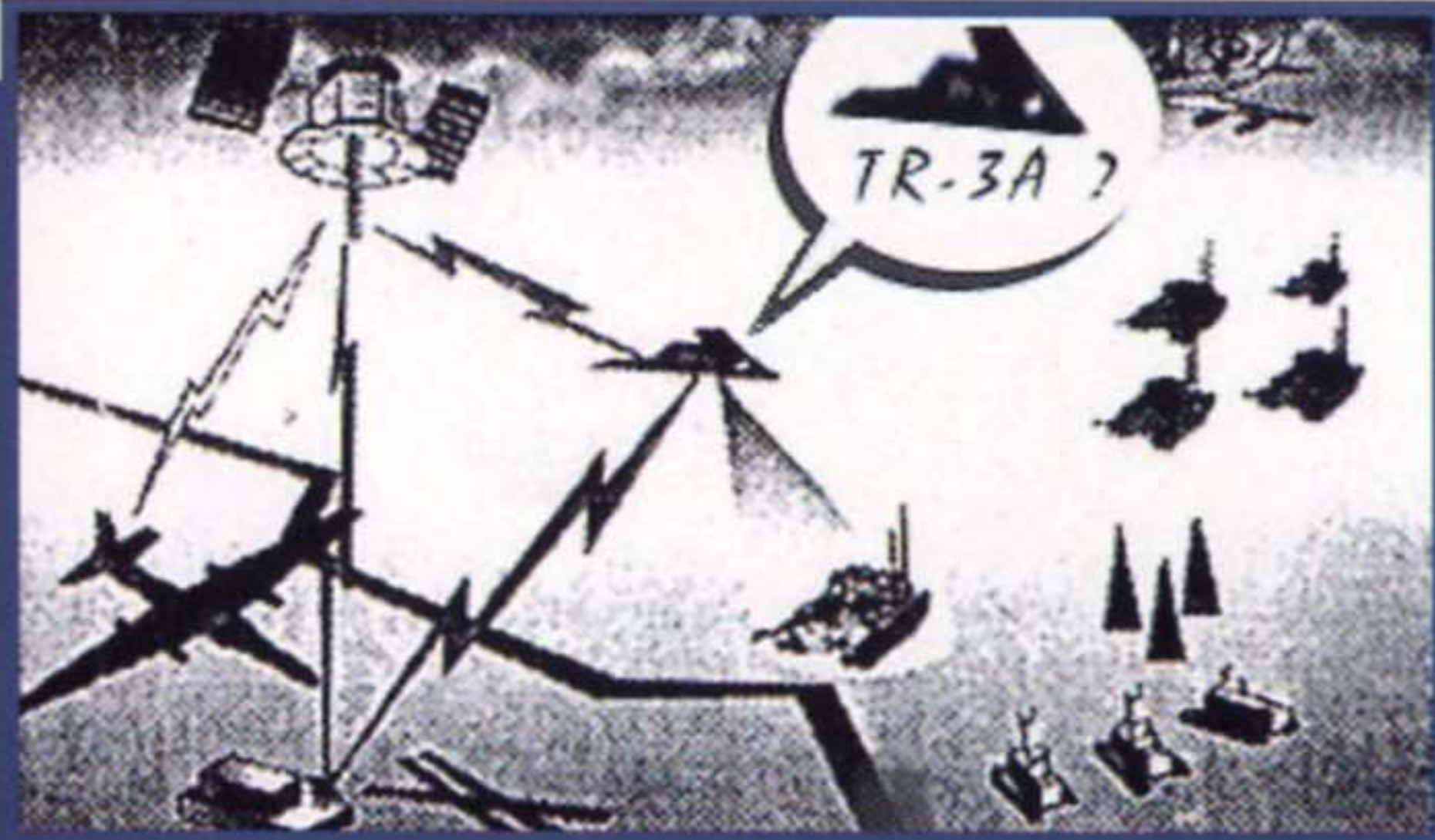




Above: One night, whilst monitoring a Roving Sands exercise in New Mexico, Steve Douglass caught what could be a TR-3 on video. The aircraft was loitering over an area that B-1 Lancers had just attacked in the White Sands Missile Range. The aircraft is flying towards the camera. Steve Douglass



Above right: A rendering of what could be construed from the TR-3 video. Steve Douglass



TR-3 revealed by accident? This illustration was originally published in Lockheed Skunkwork's employee magazine 'Horizons'. It shows a Manta-shaped aircraft relaying reconnaissance data to an orbiting satellite. The graphic entitled 'Where horizons are unlimited' detailed real-time battlefield communications. In later published versions of the graphic the aircraft was changed into a TR-1/U-2. via Steve Douglass

rounded off) 'Hopeless Diamond', but with F-117A-type canted fins and a single serpentine mesh-screened engine intake at the apex of the upper fuselage, behind the cockpit. THAP was usually illustrated as a 60° triangular Delta (again with rounded tips and nose) but with a more blended 'flying wing' configuration, inward canted tailfins and a straight trailing edge. The US Air Force's Aeronautical Systems Division certainly sketched a THAP study which fitted this description, but if Northrop got as far as a study, it seems more likely that it was based on Hal Markarian's initial 'stealth bomber' study of 1979. This was a flying wing similar to the early B-2 design studies,

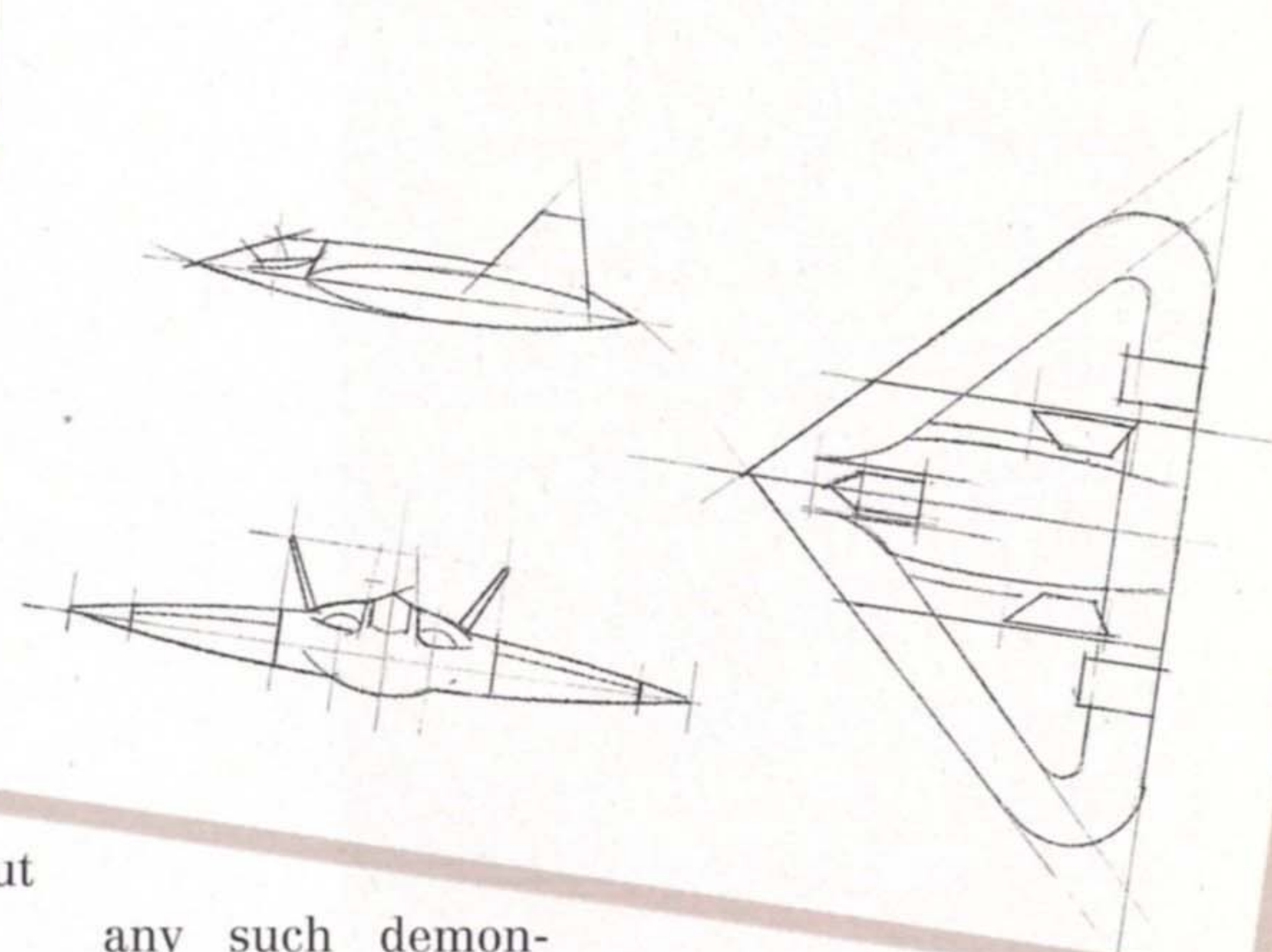
with a single 'sawtooth cut-out' in the trailing edge on each side of the centreline, rather than the production B-2's two cut-outs. The wings were also rather shorter and stubbier. The aircraft probably had inward-canted tailfins shielding the engine nozzles on the upper surface, or possibly out towards the wingtips.

Some sources suggest that the aircraft was designed, built and deployed in small numbers (perhaps 12 aircraft) as the TR-3 or TR-3A Manta (though the name, if not the designation, seems most unlikely). These sources suggest that the aircraft today serve with a squadron based at Stallion, a small airfield deep in the White Sands Missile Range.

The credibility of the TR-3 was seriously undermined because many early sightings and monitored radio transmissions attributed to the TR-3 turned out to be misidentifications of F-117As operating at night, as became clear when the F-117A's serial allocations became known. The US Air Force has explicitly denied the existence of the TR-3, which has no obvious role. The F-117A does not need a separate off-board designator or target acquisition platform, and if it had one would not have been so constrained in recent operations. Suggestions that the TR-3A might be a tactical recon platform are countered by the obvious lack of recon product from such a platform.

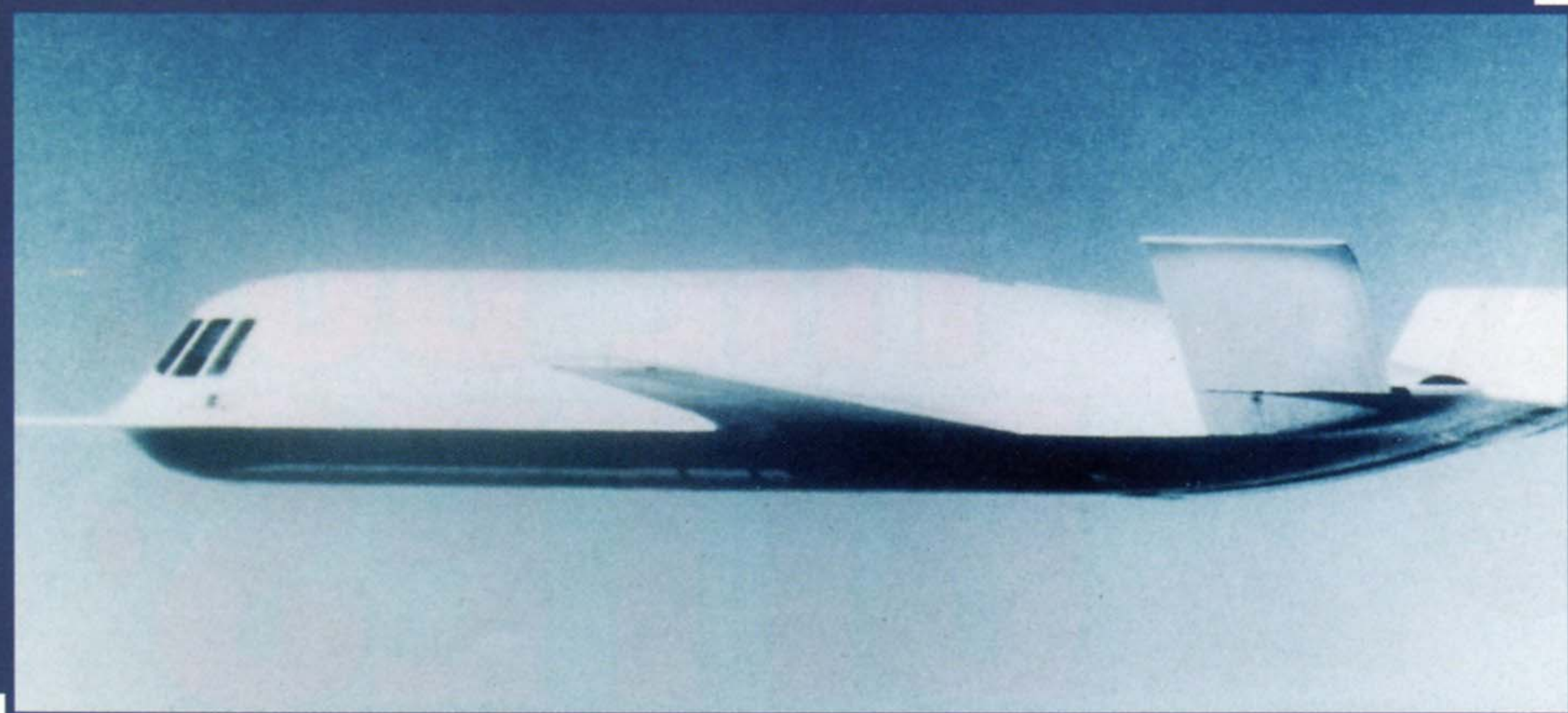
SHAMU

Early (1981) reports that Northrop was about to fly a stealth aircraft were once thought to be a confused reference to the first flight of Senior Trend (the YF-117A), and were later taken to refer to a sub-scale B-2 demonstrator. Northrop and the US Air Force convincingly denied the existence of



any such demonstrator for the B-2, but it became clear in the 1990s that a Northrop aircraft had been undergoing testing at the same time as the FSD F-117. This was described by Senior Trend programme personnel as a demonstrator for Northrop's 'Seamless Stealth Design philosophy', as later used on the B-2, as compared to Lockheed's flat-plate 'faceted' approach. Lockheed engineers reportedly called the aircraft the 'Shamu' because of its resemblance to the Killer Whale at Sea World, while the aircraft's appearance was reportedly so comical that people laughed on seeing it. Widely assumed to be a triangular or boomerang-shaped flying wing, reports from 1994 revealed that it was more conventional-looking — compared by some to the Boeing Stratocruiser airliner of the late 1940s. The aircraft's reported role also changed, with the expressed opinion that the aircraft was intended as a stealthy EW aircraft. It was described by 'Black Programme' experts as being the most credible of the rumoured 'Secret Airplanes'. All became rather clearer in 1996, when the Tacit Blue was finally revealed. This was a straight-winged, whale-like battlefield radar surveillance aircraft.

SHAMU via Chris Pocock



Over to you! In next month's *Aircraft Illustrated* we publish in-depth descriptions of how to get to the new viewing location that overlooks Groom Lake (Area 51) and Papoose Lake (S-4), so perhaps an *Aircraft Illustrated* reader will come back with definitive proof that there really is something out there — not for the faint-hearted! In the meantime, keep watching the skies and reserve next month's copy today.

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