

PIONEERS OF STEALTH®

NEWSLETTER

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Greetings Pioneers,

Recently our Vice President, Skip Hickey, was rummaging through his memorabilia collection and came across a video of Bill Elsner's 60th birthday party from 20 July 1990. This was the initial gathering of the "pioneers" before the charter that birthed the Pioneers of Stealth® social organization in 2007. Not only was 20 July Bill's birthday, but it was also the date for the start of the Dayton Airshow in Vandalia, Ohio, and afforded an opportunity for other "pioneers" from across the country to attend. For several years after, we held biennial "reunions" on the airshow weekends.



That first gathering, with close to a hundred attendees, was held at the Bella Villa Italian Club in Kettering OH, aka John Pirelli Lodge #1633, which was named after Giovanni Pirelli, the Italian Aviator. "Pioneers" across the country attending included Ben Rich, Steve Smith, Dave Lynch, Yu Ping Liu, Irv Waaland, Pat Sharp, and Ken Perko. Still frames from the video taken 36 years ago are included in this Newsletter. (See the "Blast From the Past" pages.)

Speaking of reunions, the POS leadership team is beginning the planning process for the 2027 Reunion. One of the location options being considered is returning to Dayton, Ohio, and the Bella Villa Italian Club for our dinner party. Next year's POS reunion theme could be "Anniversaries" given that it is the 80th anniversary of the USAF, 50th anniversary of modern Stealth, and the 20th anniversary of POS Biennial Reunions formally established by our Charter in 2007 at the Las Vegas reunion. Any POS members interested in being part of the 2027 Reunion Planning Team should contact Skip Hickey, the Team Leader. Skip can be reached at:

skiphickey@sbcglobal.net,
or by phone: (937) 271-6452.

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The last thing I would like to bring you up to date on is the POS Memorial Video Tribute project. After several months of studying the various creative video options, content, and resource requirements we have converged on an approach that Pete Knauth is off and running to complete by late summer. You can read more in this newsletter edition.

As usual, POS members that have memorabilia to share and/or relevant articles are encouraged to forward them for inclusion in a future newsletter editions. In closing, I wish everyone an enjoyable summer...stay healthy and safe!

Cheers,

John

A Video Tribute to Our Memorial:

Bringing the Pioneers of Stealth® Legacy to Life

The Pioneers of Stealth (POS) are collaborating with a professional filmmaker to create a short video tribute celebrating our memorial at the National Museum of the United States Air Force in Dayton, Ohio.

This video would serve as a meaningful way to share the memorial's beauty and significance with members—especially our generous memorial donors—who have not yet had the opportunity to visit in person, or who are unable to make the trip. For those who have been there, it would stand as a proud, enduring reminder of our shared contributions to stealth technology. The video is envisioned as a serene, high-quality production, streaming directly from the POS and NMUSAF websites and likely YouTube as well. We aim to complete it by late summer.



- **Style:** High definition (HD) video of the monument which will include a segment allowing viewers to clearly read the inscriptions on both sides of all monument obelisks.
- **Approach:** No people on camera, no narration—just the stones themselves telling the story, accompanied by carefully selected, appropriate background music.
- **Goal:** Let the monuments speak for themselves, evoking reflection on the pioneering programs, people, and innovations they honor.

We believe this minimalist, contemplative format will powerfully convey the dignity and historical weight of our memorial while making it accessible to our entire community.

Peter Knauth

POS Treasurer and Project Lead

Email: pgknauth@verizon.net

Phone: (757) 357-0503.

Key elements under consideration:

- **Length:** 5–7 minutes maximum, to keep it focused and impactful.



Col. Larry D. McClain, USAF (Retired)

Revision 2026

By: Col. Larry D McClain, USAF (Retired)

It recently occurred to me that I may be unique in the world of stealth. In 1958 shortly after arriving at Dayton, Captain Gus Grissom walked up and said, "Come with me." We went out to a small hangar, and as we entered the first two doors, he said, "We don't talk about this." He opened the second door to reveal a T-33 covered in a thick covering of some sort of black, rigid, foam like stuff. He then said, we are trying to show this stuff will hide the plane from radar. He also said that the stuff was heavy and because of the weight the plane could only be flown with reduced fuel load. I instantly thought that they would never make a plane of this stuff with it's thick wing and limited range.

It was not a great airplane to fly. Even with reduced fuel load it took a long ground run to get airborne. It was surprising comfortable in once airborne, but its range was severely limited. Surprisingly the stuff did hide the airplane, but the pilots head still showed. In a later unclassified report the plane is shown as all white. It was never white. It was coal black.



It took two hops to get to Florida for testing. The airplane was, of course, heavier than a normal T-33. We could only fill the drop tanks with 100 or 150 gallons of fuel. Even then the take off rolls were very long. It also had some different flying qualities. It would turn like no other T-33, but as I learned at some angle of attack it would pitch up. I accidentally did that ONCE! I was in a hard turn when the airplane seemed to swap ends. I thought I had lost the airplane, as with full forward stick it just hung there seemingly forever. Eventually the nose started down and we were flying again. My maneuvering flight was very limited thereafter. I was never the primary pilot on this test. First it was Gus Grissom and later Dick Zimmerman. Although I did fly the airplane, my role was largely as chase pilot.

Time and a half went by and I was again taken to a small hangar. This time there was an F-4 with a gold colored canopy over the back seat. I eventually took the plane to Pax River where we proved that the canopy indeed hid the occupants head.

Years passed through various assignments until I became deputy to Joe Guthrie at Edwards AFB. He called me into his office, and once again I heard the now familiar phrase, "Come with me." We went down to a small hangar at Lockheed where we were shown the strangest looking airplane I had ever seen. Designated "Have Blue", it turned out to be a proof of concept stealth airplane. I admit to being dubious about it's flight characteristics, but I was assured that it would fly.

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Col Larry D. McClain, USAF (Ret.) - Continued from Page 3.

Joe retired and being denied the changes that I wanted to make to take over his position, I was looking for a job. I ended up at Groom Lake in charge of a small detachment. Suddenly these strange airplanes showed up and we were no longer a small detachment. I will not relate the details of their testing, except to state that they did prove proof of concept. Unfortunately we lost both of the prototypes. I stayed in that job unto the first flight of the F-117 and then retired.

After retirement, I went into real estate and eventually owned an office. However, I was not happy in that role. So when

someone suggested that I apply for an opening as Northrop's rep for the B-2 program at Edwards AFB, I did. I gained a high level of regard for Northrop. When the test effort at Edward's rolled to the end, I retired ending years of association with stealth.



Photo: US Air Force

The USAF began funding improvements to Area 51 in 1977 under project SCORE EVENT. In 1979, the CIA transferred jurisdiction of the Area 51 site to the Air Force Flight Test Center at Edwards AFB. Sam Mitchell, the last CIA commander of Area 51, relinquished command to USAF Lt. Col. [Col.] Larry D. McClain.

Steve Davies: "Red Eagles. America's Secret MiGs", Osprey Publishing, 2008.

Skip's Stealthy Book Corner

Red Eagles: America's Secret MiGs

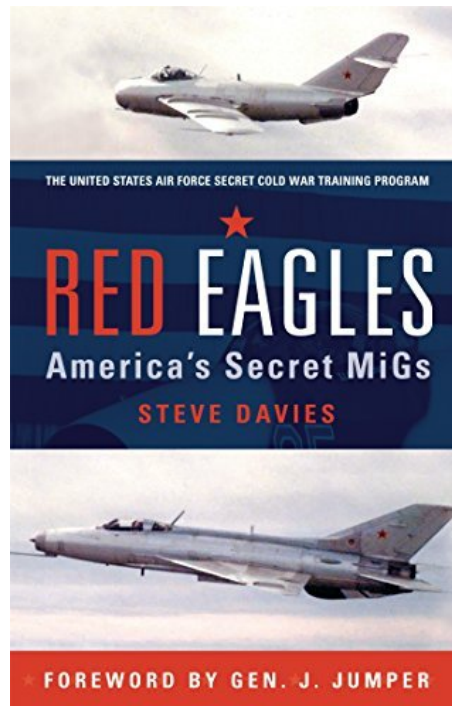
By Steve Davies

After withdrawal from Vietnam, it was realized that the standard for air to air combat training was insufficient. Tactics and combat formations used in WWII and in the Korean conflict were outdated. Air to air missiles underperformed in air to air engagements.

The Red Baron Reports

The first volume of the Red Baron reports was initiated by Weapon Systems Evaluation Group at the DoD. The second and third volumes were completed by the Tactical Fighter Weapons Center at Nellis AFB. The three volume set of reports was the culmination of an exhaustive evaluation of air to air encounters by American aircraft with Soviet supplied MiG-17's and MiG- 21's in Vietnam.

The Red Baron reports highlighted the limitations of flying basic fighter tactics during training missions against the same type of aircraft (e.g. F-4 against F-4 or F-105 against F-105). A crucial finding was that Air Force fighter pilots were not familiar with fighting aircraft that were not the same as their own. They desperately needed to receive realistic training with possessed enemy aircraft or USAF aircraft with characteristics similar to enemy aircraft.



As a result of these reports and their own combat experience fighting MiGs, a group of dedicated and tenacious fighter pilots convinced HQ USAF and DoD to initiate air combat training with dissimilar aircraft. Thus, the Aggressors were formed and became the 64th Fighter Weapons Squadron in 1972. They would initially fly T-38's, then F-5E's as threat aircraft to engage frontline fighter pilots in air combat.

The book describes, in chronological order supplemented by the comments from participants, how the Aggressors morphed into the 4477th Test and Evaluation Squadron under the code name "Constant Peg". These pilots flew MiG aircraft that operated under the same air doctrine as the Soviet Air Command. This provided realistic training to our aircrews in combat exercises like Red Flag.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. I learned about the History of the Red Hats, some of whom I worked with while in the F-15 SPO and the F-117 Program. I highly recommend this book to those interested in Air Force history.

Skip Hickey

Blast From the Past

July 20, 1990



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Blast From the Past - Continued from Page 6.



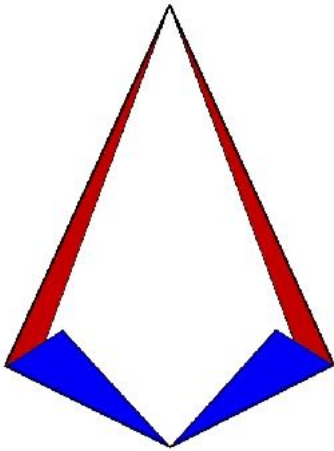
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Blast From the Past - Continued from Page 7.



Ready, Willing, and Able



It's not too early to begin thinking about the future of the Pioneers of Stealth as we approach the Fall 2027 reunion.

Will we as an organization slowly fade away as membership declines? Or will we make a deliberate effort to energize existing members and keep the lights on and maybe even consider additional tasks and responsibilities?

A key factor in these necessary and important deliberations will be: Are there available members ready, willing and able to undertake an active role in the future of POS?

To help answer this, we'd like to create a "Talent Bank" where members can indicate their willingness to actively participate in the future of POS. Whether it be to elected office, project development and management, special assignments, Newsletter contributions, computer skills, etc.

Please send your Talent Bank thoughts and ideas to John Summerlot (jsummerlot@gmail.com) and Skip Hickey (skiphickey@sbcglobal.net) for consideration in the preparation of the 2027 business meeting agenda. It's not too soon to start now.



PIONEERS OF STEALTH® LEADERSHIP

STEERING COMMITTEE

OFFICERS

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John Summerlot
jrsummerlot@gmail.com

Vice President

Skip Hickey

Secretary

Steve Bepko

Treasurer

Peter Knauth

Membership/Communications

Jerry Vanden Bosch

Bob Gilmore

Social Chairman

Ralph Salvucci

Historian

Dennis Jarvi

President Emeritus

John Griffin

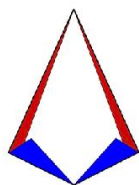
SENIOR ADVISORY GROUP

Rob Bongiovi

Jack Gordon

Dick Scofield

Doug Young



www.PioneersofStealth.org

PIONEERS OF STEALTH®

Pioneers of Stealth® Charter

Purpose. The purpose of the Pioneers of Stealth organization is to perpetuate the spirit and achievements of a relatively small number of government and industry people in the early days of low observables technology and development. These "pioneers" believe the bonds created through their sharing of these successful achievements will always be an important part of their life experiences. They are proud of their accomplishments and enjoy being together to visit and revisit with those who all made valuable contributions to these challenging and revolutionary programs. Maintaining this social relationship is extremely important and a primary objective of this organization. The Pioneers of Stealth also believe that their value to the current defense acquisition establishment is best accomplished by using their strong record of achievements to be advocates and mentors for industry-government teamwork, streamlined management procedures, and minimal oversight and reporting requirements – all factors that significantly contributed to the historic successes of the low observables programs.

Next Issue.....

**Letter From the President
Update on 2027 Reunion
Memorial Video Tribute Update**

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