

ARGON
BRIEFING PRESENTATION

Declassified

In Accordance with

on NOV 26 1997

~~TOP SECRET~~



ARGON BRIEFING

This paper sets forth information regarding a TOP SECRET activity known as ARGON. The sensitivity of its mission in relation to current world affairs had made the activity a Presidential concern. Accordingly, maximum security will prevail requiring the highest standard of clearance. A strict "need-to-know" policy is in force and neither rank, position nor prior clearance are acceptable justification for automatic access to ARGON information.

Project ARGON involves the covert development and operational use of a mapping satellite from which a recoverable capsule will be retrieved at a pre-selected ocean area. Prior to the initiation of this Project the development of such a system was under consideration by the U. S. Army and known as Project VEDAS. Project VEDAS was officially cancelled by an ARPA directive in June 1959. Project ARGON then is the re-activation of the original VEDAS proposal.

In accord with Presidential desires, ARGON is being carried out under the authority of the Advanced Research Projects Agency and the Central Intelligence Agency with the support of the U. S. Army and the U. S. Air Force.

Project ARGON will utilize a modified vehicle configuration of the type now being developed and perfected by the ARPA sponsored DISCOVERER series. This configuration includes a Thor boost and the Ballastier second stage. ARGON involves the utilization of a camera system designed for simultaneous celestial and ground photography to obtain accurate geodetic coverage.

Central Intelligence Agency is participating jointly with ARPA in the supervision of the technical development especially as it applies to the actual reconnaissance equipment. The responsibility of all covert procurement and/or operational and personnel security including cover is exclusively vested in Central Intelligence Agency and administered from ARGON headquarters within the Agency. ARGON launchings will be carried out at Vandenberg Air Force Base. Specific timing within the scheduling will be determined insofar as possible on the basis of

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weather prevailing over target areas. Target weather will be furnished through CIA/ARGON Headquarters and firing dates will be selected by the Agency in accordance with vehicle readiness dates determined by AFBMD. It is planned that approximately four vehicles will be produced and that the first operational firing will commence in May 1968.

The initial steps taken to place this Project on a covert basis was the cancellation of the VILAS program. The security considerations and arrangements that have followed this cancellation are as follows:

A. A clearance and briefing system has been established wherein the approval for access to ARGON is granted only by CIA. A master index of ARGON clearances is maintained at ARGON Project Headquarters within the Agency. Certification of such clearance must be obtained by contacting the Security Office of ARGON Headquarters.

B. There are two types of briefings given ARGON-cleared personnel. The first type concerns those individuals who are given this briefing and are made completely witting of the sensitive aspects of the activity. The second type is a limited briefing covering only that information absolutely essential for an individual to perform his or her particular function and does not necessarily include the information outlined below.

C. There are three principal facts which personnel affiliated with ARGON are obliged to protect:

1. That the United States is currently engaged in a reconnaissance satellite program.

2. That CIA is affiliated with such a program.

3. That certain supplier groups engaged in the development and manufacturing of reconnaissance equipment are affiliated with Project ARGON.

D. Compartmentation of this Project from other activities in both government and private industry has been established. This includes the existence and location of certain covert facilities where sensitive work is performed.

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In keeping with the requirement to maintain maximum security a cover explanation will be developed to plausibly explain the launchings to occur during the summer of 1968.

It should be noted also that the code word ARGON is a classified term and must not become known to non-cleared personnel.

Security is the responsibility of everyone. Any act or incident which tends to embarrass the ARGON program, its members, cover, organizations or the U. S. Government will result in severe disciplinary action. The success of the ARGON program is dependent upon your complete support of security requirements.

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