

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY

November 18, 1963

Dr. Albert D. Wheelon
Deputy Director (Science & Technology)
Central Intelligence Agency
Washington, D. C., 20505

Dear Bud,

The establishment of the Satellite Photography Working Group, composed of qualified CIA, DOD and Industry representatives, affords an excellent opportunity to achieve a more basic understanding of the reasons for the variations in quality and resolution we have experienced to date with the CORONA system. The conduct of the initial session on 13 November was well thought out. I am sure that the motivation provided to the Group will have a definite influence over the course of the study efforts.

Your memorandum of 5 November outlining the organization, objectives, personnel selections, and working arrangements did not reach me in time for me to provide you with considered comments and recommendations prior to the initial meeting. I am in general agreement with the overall approach you have outlined, and in fact am looking forward to the benefits that should accrue to the NRP when the Group completes the study. There are however a number of points on which I should like to comment in more detail.

It seems to me important in the case of studies, such as this one, by outside groups to be sure that the task is well enough defined in content and scope that all parties recognize what is to be accomplished and can be confident of its accomplishment in a reasonable length of time. I feel therefore

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that the three month's duration suggested in your letter is appropriate, and that this should be made explicit in the planning of the Group's activities. We can of course review this decision as the Group's work continues; as noted again later, I suggest that this review certainly be made about mid-January.

In part to assist in delineating the task, and in part for another reason to be noted, I feel that objectives a, b, c, and d, as outlined in your memorandum should be undertaken specifically in reference to IDEALIST and CORONA. This limitation can be reviewed later. At the present time, however, I think it would be unwise to divert the Group into analysis of systems still under development until they have succeeded in their task as applied to our presently operational systems, for which both our data and our experience are more complete. In requesting this limitation, I do not mean to restrict access to the results of the GAMBIT and OXCART tests to date. In fact, I think that these results will help to separate external influences, such as that of the atmosphere, from factors internal to the CORONA and IDEALIST systems. If further tests are desirable with GAMBIT or OXCART for obtaining comparative data, these should be considered.

I concur with the objectives f, h, and i as described in your letter. These objectives occupy an area of study which, it seems to me, has been the subject of much casual conversation but very little definitive objective analysis. I believe that these three objectives should receive very serious consideration by the Working Group.

The objectives to which I have referred above represent important work which seems well suited for such a group as you have selected. The working arrangements also seem amenable to a serious attempt to reach them. I believe that the Group should be limited to these particular objectives, and every effort be made to reach them. In particular, I agree with the view that I believe you expressed at the opening meeting, that the objectives listed as e and g should not be specific responsibilities of this group. Although the results of the

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Working Group's efforts may well form the basis of specific product improvements, as well as design of newer systems, the task of determining the specific improvements to on-going systems is an NRO responsibility which should be assigned to the responsible NRO technical management unit, with contractor participation controlled by this unit, and personnel of competing contractors excluded. Similarly, the determination of the design of new systems is also a task for appropriate NRO technical personnel, although the results of the Working Group should be most helpful in this work.

The arrangements outlined in your letter seem well planned. I do however question any early need for visits of the Group to preparation, loading, and launching facilities, except perhaps for general orientation. If there is any adverse effect on the performance of the system exerted by the preparation, loading and launching activities, it must be exerted by influencing some element of the optical path or by disturbing the motion of vehicle or film. It seems to me a first task of the Group is to get a quantitative feel of the effects involved, and an understanding of what the sensitive elements of the optical and mechanical system really are.

As to staffing and organization, I think that the Working Group should be kept as small as possible, and confined to the very best qualified people. In my view, this is necessary, not only to be consistent with a basic NRO philosophy, which we continually enforce over strong objections within the Department of Defense, but even more fundamentally, to insure the accomplishment of something of real value. Consistent with my comments contained herein, the NRO will provide the requested personnel support and provide information necessary to the work of the Group.

I have selected Lt Colonel Henry Howard of the NRO Staff and Lt Colonel [REDACTED] of NRO Program A (SPPL) to serve as members of the Working Group. I consider both to be well qualified for this effort and am confident that they will contribute materially.

In regard to the funding of the Group effort, inasmuch as NRO is tasking DD/S&T to accomplish this project, I am agreeable

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to the use of the NRO funds for the costs associated with outside consultants only. Accordingly, I have instructed the Comptroller, NRO, to provide financing directions to Director of Program B.

I will appreciate your instructing the Group to direct its efforts to objectives a, b, c, d, f, h, and i as outlined in your letter and requested herein. I am interested in being kept informed of the progress being made. I suggest that by 15 January 1964 an interim status report be made to Gene Fubini, you, and me for determination of progress for subsequent orientation of the study.

Sincerely,

BROCKWAY McMILLAN
Director
National Reconnaissance Office

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