

MEMORIES OF GROOM LANE

By: Hervey Stockman



My introduction to Area 51 started at the Brown Derby in Hollywood and a drive to a hotel on Hollywood and Vine where Glen Dunaway, Jake Kratt, Bruce Grant and I met John Raines from security. At the Lockheed Air Terminal in Burbank we climbed aboard a C-54 and headed northeast towards Nellis AFB and Indian Springs. Mt. Charleston slid by and we were in the restricted area. We dropped down and came into the dry lake.

The Ops, housing and hangars were adjacent an air strip about 1,500 to 2,000 feet in length. Jake, Glen, Bruce and I were directed to a house trailer, which would be our home until we headed out for England. Carmine, Marty Knutson, and Carl Overstreet were already in place. We met Col. Fred McCoy, Phil Karis and others who would participate in our checkout. Blue suiters that I can recall were Hank Meierdierck, Lou Setter, Hank Majeski, Sam Cox, and a Major weatherman.

The flying programs were straightforward. T-33s and U-2's. To simulate the flat approach angle of the U-2 the T-33 flew with I believe 10-degree flaps and a throttle setting of 65 to 70%. We were not to reduce power below that setting until the T-33 was on the lakebed. The first U-2 flights were without the partial pressure suit and faceplate. To assist our depth perception and desired landing attitude in the U-2 a station wagon with UHF two way radio would await U-2 approaches and speed along side the landing U-2 calling out height between the tandem wheels and the lake surface. For example, "you're ten feet, eight, six feet etc. down to touchdown. Meierdierck was a super caller. Until we became accustomed to the U-2's sensitive elevator control and the wheel type yoke, the final approaches to touchdown were a series of oscillations. As I recall we came over the lake's boundaries at about 70 - 75 knots or MPH. Early on we were sent east to be fitted for the suit.

(From CIA website) On July 4, 1956, Hervey Stockman piloted a U-2 through the skies over the Soviet Union. His mission was to collect photographic reconnaissance of important Soviet bases. Thousands of feet below Stockman and the U-2 were several

Soviet MiG fighters trying to intercept the reconnaissance aircraft. July 4, 2010 marks the 54th anniversary of Hervey Stockman's mission-the first flight of the U-2 over the Soviet Union.

Hervey Stockman was born in Andover, N.J., in 1922. After attending Princeton University for two years, Stockman enlisted in the Aviation Cadet Program of the U.S. Army Air Forces in September 1942.

During World War II, Stockman was assigned to England where he flew the P-51 Mustang. He was credited with destroying two enemy aircraft in aerial combat and flew 68 combat missions before leaving active duty in 1945.

After the war, Stockman attended the Pratt Institute School of Art and Design where he majored in industrial design. Following graduation, Stockman work for General Motors as an automotive designer.

With the Cold War becoming tenser as the Soviet Union built up its nuclear strike capabilities, President Eisenhower authorized the construction of a high-altitude reconnaissance aircraft in 1954. Its purpose would be to fly over the Soviet Union and collect strategic intelligence. This mission was entrusted to the Central Intelligence Agency. Kelly Johnson at Lockheed's "Skunkworks" designed the U-2. It would be flown by one pilot, at altitudes of 65,000 to 70,000 feet at subsonic speed. The U-2's design allowed it to glide and stay aloft for more than eight hours. By 1956 the U-2 had been tested and was ready for its first flight over the Soviet Union.

Stockman and the U-2's First Mission Over the USSR

In 1956, Stockman was recalled to active duty in the U.S. Air Force. Initially, Stockman was stationed in Bergstrom, Texas flying F-84 Thunderjets. However, Stockman's experience flagged him for an important Cold War mission: overhead reconnaissance of the Soviet Union. Stockman was chosen to fly the very first flight over the Soviet Union. On the Fourth of July in 1956, Stockman left Wiesbaden in West Germany and crossed the Soviet border near Grodno in Belarus. The flight continued over several bomber bases in central Belarus, then north to naval shipyards and bomber bases at Leningrad. Stockman concluded his flight by passing over military facilities in the Baltic States before returning to Germany. The entire flight lasted eight hours and 45 minutes. During his flight, Stockman was tracked by Soviet radar and a number of MiG fighters attempted to intercept him. After this successful flight, Stockman went on to fly several more U-2 missions over the Soviet Union and the Middle East between 1956 and 1958. The U-2 Stockman flew is currently on display at the National Air & Space Museum in Washington, D.C.

Following his U-2 missions, Stockman returned to active duty in the U.S. Air Force. During the 1960s, he began flying combat missions in Southeast Asia. In May 1967, Stockman was forced to eject from his F-4 Phantom over North Vietnam and was taken prisoner. He was held for 2,093 days before being released during Operation Homecoming in 1973. After recovering from his injuries, Stockman attended the Air War College at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama. He graduated in 1974 and went on to serve with NATO in Europe and as Director of Joint Test and Evaluation at Kirkland

