The Corona Project Essay, Research Paper

The Discoverer Program was a fake to conceal the Corona Program, as a series of photo-reconnaissance spy satellites. Corona was the first photo-reconnaissance program, and the beginnings for military and space imaging programs of today.

Corona was developed in secrecy so that the targeted nations wouldn t know what was planned. The U.S. government announced a series of scientific goals, including biological and reentry experiments for space flight, but none were actually planned. The cover was really elaborate that an entire staff, who didn t know about Corona, was assigned to Discoverer where scientific instruments were placed on Discoverer satellites and removed before launch.

We found out Corona today because President Clinton signed an executive order on February 24, 1995, releasing information and more than 800,000 images of the Earth taken by the Corona Program.

The Corona satellites were unimaginable with its many, many objectives! First, it imaged all of Soviets medium-range, intermediate-range and ICBM complexes. Second, it imaged each Soviet submarine class from deployment to operational bases. Third, it provided inventories of Soviet bombers and fighters. Fourth, it revealed the presence of Soviet missiles in Egypt protecting the Suez Canal. Fifth, it identified Soviet nuclear assistance to the People s Republic of China. Sixth, it monitored the SALT I treaty. Seventh, it uncovered the Soviet ABM program and sites. Eight, it identified Soviet atomic weapon storage installations. Nine, it identified the People s Republic of China s missile launching sites. Ten, it determined precise locations of Soviet air defense missile batteries. Eleven, it observed the construction and deployment of the Soviet ocean surface fleet. Twelve, it identified Soviet command, control installations and networks. Thirteen, it provided mapping for Strategic Air Command targeting and bomber routes. Fourteen, it identified the Plesteak Missile Test Range, north of Moscow. (With many more other functions!)

Today, the military enjoys the best technology, but space images for civilian use are of high quality, including images from French and Russian sources. This technology began with a Defense Department program called Corona.

Corona was the first operational space imaging reconnaissance satellite program, approved in February 1958. Its’ goal was to take pictures from space of the Soviet Bloc countries and return the photographic film for processing and analysis. In the 1950’s, it became increasingly difficulty to obtain intelligence data about soviet military capabilities, especially nuclear. Balloons carrying cameras (Genetrix- the same thing explained to the people of Roswell, NM about the famous UFO siting) at high altitude were tried starting on January 22, 1956 but weren t reliable. High altitude U-2 spy planes were used to gather intelligence, starting July 4, 1956, but were discontinued when Francis Gary Powers was shot down by a Soviet SAM May 1, 1960. Outer space became the ultimate ‘high ground’.

Corona camera systems were integrated into an Agena upper stage and launched into Polar orbit by Thor booster from Van den Berg AFB, CA. Corona used an innovative constant rotating panoramic camera system, which provided a stable platform which was constantly pointed toward the Earth. The basic camera technology was a breakthrough developed as part of the Genetrix Project. Film was loaded into a recovery vehicle and returned to Earth for air recovery by USAF C-119 aircraft, while floating to Earth on a parachute. Sea recovery was used as a backup.

Corona was developed in secrecy so that targeted nations wouldn t know what was planned. Even the existence of Corona wasn t acknowledged. The Corona project management structure became the National Reconnaissance Office(NRO). NRO is a super secret agency whose exist was not even acknowledged until recently. On December 23 1958, the government created an project, called Discoverer, with an acknowledged goal of scientific research: testing of returning vehicles to Earth for the recovery of occupants, instruments, films and other scientific payloads; development of an early warning system for the detection of enemy missiles; development of a stable platform for scientific observations. The entire Discoverer Project was a fake! No scientific objectives were planned. Discoverer actually had a staff working on scientific instruments, including launching pods for space mice, but none were ever launched or intended to be launched. Discoverer Project staff did not know about Corona. The cover was so elaborate that scientific instruments placed on Discoverer satellites were removed before launch. Although Corona developed recovery techniques, these were never intended as research for manned space programs. The Discoverer program was publicly classified after the launch of Discoverer XXXVIII, December 12, 1961. Those involved in Discoverer went on to other projects.

The Corona satellites was the first photo-reconnaissance satellite, the first mapping of earth from space, the first stereo-optical data from space, the first recovery of a object from space and first multiple reentry vehicles from space.

There were three diagnostic flights to test the Thor-Agena systems. These were designated Discoverer I, II and III. These were related to, but not part of the Corona series. Discover I had long been thought to be the first successful polar orbit. Data released from Corona suggested that Discoverer I didn t actually achieve orbit. It was reported as a success by the military based on successful initiation of second stage burn. Orbital insertion wasn t ever confirmed by telemetry. The first polar orbit was probably Discoverer II. Corona started with mission 9001, June 25, 1959, which failed to orbit. This was publicly called Discoverer IV. Mission 9002 (8/13/59) was the first to achieve orbit, but the camera failed. The camera also failed on 9003 and 9005. Missions 9004-6-7 failed to orbit. The camera worked for the first time on mission 9008, but the RV wasn t recoverable. A combination of extraordinary corrective action and two diagnostic flights brought success with the first photos from mission 9009. The first Corona image was a soviet bomber base at Mys Schmidta in the Far East, only 400 miles from Nome, AK. By mid-1961, Corona supplied a constant stream of intelligence data. Early Corona missions lasted one day. Later missions could take sufficient film and power supplies to last 19 days.

The intelligence community used two sets of terminology for the Corona series. The Air Force and CIA – program managers – used program and launch designations. Those using the Photo-reconnaissance (’spy photos’) referred to the camera systems, Keyhole or KH. Corona missions were numbered according to camera systems.

During the series of 145 launches, Corona satellites photographed vast portions of the earth’s surface. That photography allowed the United States and its allies to keep track of military targets and operations in denied areas and to understand Sino-Soviet strategic capabilities. With Corona data the Free World could track arms sales and activities of Soviet client states. But above all, the imagery allowed the U.S. Government to make more informed national security decisions based on accurate information rather than guesswork. We can wonder of how smart the U.S. government is in trying to deceive us- the average American citizen into these secret lies once known to us as the project Discover (the cover-up for the secret Corona satellites!!!) Since no one knew about Corona until now, no covers were prepared specifically for Corona launches. However, covers were prepared for Discover missions and secret satellites, so covers probably exist for these launches. The existence of cover-ups for most of the launches have been verified!