

# IN MEMORIAM

## John Parangosky

*National Reconnaissance Pioneer*

Former Central Intelligence Agency program manager Mr. John Parangosky died at the age of 84, on Sept. 9, 2004, in Leesburg, Virginia (Washington Post, 2004). In 2000, the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO) named Mr. Parangosky a Pioneer of National Reconnaissance in recognition of his accomplishments helping to develop several groundbreaking systems. The U-2 and A-12/SR-71<sup>1</sup> aerial reconnaissance aircraft exemplified two national reconnaissance breakthroughs that he helped facilitate. Mr. Parangosky made his most notable contributions as chief of the CIA development staff on Corona, the nation's first photoreconnaissance satellite program, which operated from 1960-1972 (Oder, Fitzpatrick, and Worthman, 1988). These pioneering programs established the precedent for future successful collaboration on reconnaissance projects among military, industrial, scientific, and intelligence sectors.

With the national reconnaissance capability still in its infancy, Mr. Parangosky became part of the top management

team on the U-2 project in the mid-1950s. Designed to provide high-altitude monitoring of Soviet strategic capabilities, the U-2 represented the most technologically advanced project undertaken by the CIA to that point (Taubman, 2003). By 1959, Parangosky served as deputy chief of the U-2 unit at Adana, Turkey, a main staging base from which commenced U-2 overflights of the Soviet Union, its Eastern European satellite states, and the Middle East.

Parangosky also helped engineer the U-2's proposed successor, the A-12 Oxcart. The Oxcart implemented another technological advancement as the world's first successful stealth aircraft. Parangosky advanced its development from its inception in 1956 through the test flight stage in the 1960s, and made significant contributions toward creating a reconnaissance aircraft that possessed unprecedented speed, range, and altitude capabilities for its time (Pedlow & Welzenbach, 1998, McIninch, 1971).

Project Corona, which Mr. Parangosky oversaw as chief of the project

<sup>1</sup> Aircraft designer Clarence "Kelly" Johnson of Lockheed Aircraft Corporation originally called the vehicle A-11, but Lockheed designated the final single-seated CIA reconnaissance aircraft A-12, after substituting laminated plastic vertical tail section fins in place of the titanium originals. This alteration achieved a lower radar cross-section. The Air Force retained the A-11 designator as official cover for A-12 development, and for use in developing a two-seated interceptor version, called the YF-12A. Lockheed later produced for the Air Force the SR-71, a two-seated reconnaissance aircraft, which despite utilizing a smaller, inferior camera to the one deployed in the A-12, enjoyed a much longer operational life than its CIA counterpart.

office development staff, represented nothing less than a revolution in reconnaissance capability. With the successful mid-air recovery of 3,000 feet of film on August 18, 1960, Corona ushered in the era of space-based photoreconnaissance. By the completion of its second mission, Corona had acquired images of more denied Soviet territory than all the U-2 overflights combined. By effectively managing the collective efforts of the diverse contractor workforce that developed Corona, Mr. Parangosky established a reputation as one of the finest team builders in the CIA's Directorate of Science and Technology (McDonald, 1997).

The Glomar Explorer program served as one of the last major efforts Parangosky headed as a member of the DS&T's Special Projects Staff (SPS) at CIA. Code-named Project Jennifer, Glomar involved the construction of a deep-water collection vessel to raise a Soviet submarine that had sunk sixteen thousand feet below the Pacific Ocean surface. During the raising operation on August 12, 1974, the submarine broke into two pieces, and the stern section was lost. Despite this, the Glomar vessel's huge claws succeeded in salvaging most of the Soviet sub, which upon resurfacing was discovered to contain several nuclear torpedoes, as well as valuable weapons systems and technology intelligence (Andrew, 1995).

Mr. Parangosky was born in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania. After graduating with a bachelor's degree in economics from Washington and Jefferson College in 1941, he served in the Army Air Force

as first lieutenant during World War Two. At the war's conclusion, he continued his education at the University of Pennsylvania and Columbia University School of Law in 1946 and 1947, prior to joining the CIA in 1948. In 1997, the CIA honored him as one of its 50 "Trailblazers" for his work in managing the joint contract team that developed the "world's fastest and highest flying stealth reconnaissance aircraft"—the A-12/SR-71. (CIA 1997, McIninch 1971, Washington Post, 2004).

After leaving the CIA, Mr. Parangosky continued to serve as a consultant to government and industry on reconnaissance programs until the mid-1990s (Washington Post, 2004).

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