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CHAPTER NEWSLETTER – DECEMBER 2009

JANUARY MEETING — 11:30 AM — WEDNESDAY, 13 JANUARY 2010
VERNON'S STEAKHOUSE @ CALICO CAFÉ, 4TH STREET

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Owing to the delay in issuing this newsletter, and with apologies to all—but especially to Jim Hoffsis—I would like to focus on a review of his excellent presentation at the 9 December meeting, in which he recapped the events of AFIO's 2009 Fall Intelligence Symposium in Las Vegas, Nevada. Chapter administrative and personnel notes will follow at the newsletter's end.

JIM HOFFSIS & THE NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

Jim opened his remarks by noting that he had been to several previous AFIO annual meetings in Washington, D.C. and, while those were interesting because of their proximity to national agencies, the 2009 meeting in Las Vegas was, in his opinion, the best meeting he had ever attended. The symposium comprised three full days, encompassing (1) a broad spectrum of briefings at Nellis AFB; (2) Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) operations at Creech AFB; (3) a visit to the Nevada Test Site; and (4) Chapter workshops, special presentations, and a banquet at Harrah's Casino and Hotel.

The opening day [Wed, 14 Oct] was spent at Nellis AFB, adjacent to the city. Jim was surprised to discover that this Air Force Base was like an oasis in the desert, with lots of grass ("lush landscaping"), tile-roofed buildings, and a magnificent Officers' Club, where the group of 200 AFIO folks received briefings from hands-on experts on UAV (PREDATOR and REAPER) operations, Intelligence and Counterintelligence activities, National Laboratory support to the Intelligence Community, and an overview of the Nevada Test Site.

Day 2 [Thu, 15 Oct] saw the group off to Creech AFB, a long way out of Las Vegas, and possessing none of the lush or architectural attributes of Nellis AFB. This is evidently a no-frills desert base, devoted to the launch and control of UAV combat support operations. The group got a close-up look at both the PREDATOR and REAPER drones, and detailed information on their operational capabilities. A few facts:

PREDATOR: 37-foot wingspan, 29 feet long, 115 horsepower engine
Speed - 135 mph at altitude of 8,000–10,000 feet
Equipped with high resolution daytime and night (Infrared) cameras
Armament – Hellfire missiles

REAPER: 66-foot wingspan, 36 feet long, 950 horsepower engine
Speed – about 200 mph at altitude of 20,000–25,000 feet
Equipped with radar and multispectral imaging systems

Armament – 14 Hellfire missiles, or a combination of Hellfire missiles
and two Paveway II 500-lb laser guided bombs

Significantly, the term UAV is a misnomer. In fact, it takes 40-60 people to support and operate one of these missions. The drones are remotely operated from Creech AFB (and now Holloman AFB, we understand), and thus are visually controlled at a distance of 10,000 miles by experienced pilots sitting at a console...talk about computer games! Given the fact that there is a two-second delay in the signal transmission from the drone to the operator, targeting has to be precise, and landings can be dicey. If the weather turns bad and the remote operators lose visual contact with the target area, there are personnel on the ground in the operational area who can take control, if necessary, to safely land the drones. To date, and to the great credit of the operators, no drone has been lost to enemy action, though several have been damaged or destroyed by hard landings or crashes. After 40-60 flight hours, each UAV is crated up and shipped back to Nellis AFB for a complete tear-down and rebuild, and a return to the combat zone.

Following the UAV demonstrations, the group of 200 boarded the buses for a trip even farther north to the Dept. of Energy National Test Site (NTS). Jim says the NTS—home to our nuclear arsenal's development and tests, and to Area 51—is the most interesting place he's ever been. No cell phones or cameras allowed, and non-US citizens need not apply for a visitor's pass. Base Camp Mercury is the headquarters for this proving ground for America's nuclear arsenal, and includes the Frenchman Flat site where our continental atmospheric tests were conducted. We cannot possibly convey, here, all the detail described to us by Jim at the meeting, but a couple of high points are in order:

Frenchman Flat was constructed in 120 days by a workforce of 5,000-6,000 men working day and night, and transported to and from the site by a fleet of 80-100 buses. A replica of an American town was built, with mannequins in the homes, food in the refrigerators, and cars in the driveways, all for the purpose of determining the effects of an atomic blast on typical structures and on humans. Pigs were employed in the actual tests because pigskin is the closest to human skin. In addition, a Japanese-style village was built to learn what effects the blast would have on that type of construction. Members of Congress, VIPs and military observers watched these atmospheric tests from a distance of 7-8 miles. The AFIO visitors got to walk around "ground zero," and learned that, despite the effects at ground level, there is no resultant radioactive contamination of groundwater, even 2,600 feet below the surface.

The other location generating intense interest was Area 51, shrouded even today in an aura of some secrecy. The group did learn that Area 51 has a 5-mile long runway (visible on aerial imagery), and has long been a test site for experimental aircraft, where trials can be conducted well out of public view. Mr. Hoffsis offered numerous other observations and facts in his presentation and, because of the interest among members, has provided source information for those wanting more detail, especially about the NTS. Publications about the NTS and Frenchman Flat are available, and contain charts, data and photographs. Further information is available from the DOE office:

U.S. Department of Energy
Nevada Operations Office
Office of Public Affairs and Information
P.O. Box 98518
Las Vegas NV 89193-8518

Or from their website: <http://www.nv.doe.gov>

Day 3 (Fri, 16 Oct) was devoted to Chapter workshops, a meeting of Chapter Officers (our Chapter was ably represented by Jim), several presentations, remarks by AFIO President Gene Poteat, and a wrap-up banquet.

We are indebted to Jim, not just for representing our Chapter at the national meeting, but for bringing a comprehensive overview to the group upon his return. Thanks, Jim!

OTHER CHAPTER BUSINESS

PERSONNEL NOTES:

- Dick Callaghan's memorial service was well attended in Santa Fe, and several AFIO members were present to represent the Chapter (Dolph Saenz, Joe and Jean Yardumian, Jim Hoffsis, Jerry Monahan, Bob Clark, Sam Shaw, and Pete Bostwick). Dick's long time friend and former Federal Agent Glenn Holmes spoke of Dick's professional life and his value as a personal friend and mentor. Additional remarks were offered by Dolph Saenz, our Chapter co-founder, and by former Chapter VP Bob Clark. Danny Wilding, an SAS veteran, occasional visitor to our meetings, and old friend of Dick's, played "Danny Boy" and other musical selections in tribute. Of special note, a Law Enforcement Honor Guard was provided by officers of the New Mexico State Police, the Santa Fe County Sheriff's Dept, and the Santa Fe Police Dept. In addition to the officers' somber and professional presence, the New Mexico State Police presented Lois Callaghan with an American flag, after which "Taps" was sounded by a bugler, and a bagpiper concluded the service with "Amazing Grace."
- Brendan O'Donovan continues his recovery from a serious surgery, and he anticipates having to take an extended leave of absence from Chapter affairs. We wish him a speedy return to good health, and a quick resumption of his activities as an artist and as an active AFIO member.
- Ruby Ellen Smith is bouncing back from hip replacement surgery a bit more slowly than she had hoped. She remains at the rehab facility, undergoing daily physical therapy and working toward restoring her ability to place her full weight on the new hip. Her spirits are high, but she is anxious to return home as soon as she can. Meanwhile, anyone wishing to call and cheer her up can reach her at her home number of 293-3676, which they have transferred to her room at the rehab center.
- Ron Cuellar has managed to retain his sense of humor and a philosophical outlook as he recovers at home from a recent sternum fracture...it's really hard to slow this guy down. Ron hopes to return to New Mexico sometime this year, and we wish him all the best in the meantime.

ADMINISTRIVIA:

1. The Chapter has two leadership vacancies that are seriously impeding the efficient conduct of business – the position of 1st VP remains vacant, and Brendan's absence is sorely felt. In addition, 2nd VP Jerry Monahan is facing a hip replacement in the coming months, and is likely to be out of action for a while. Volunteers would be most welcome to fill in these key positions, temporarily, as it is unlikely your President and Treasurer—however enthusiastic they are—can pick up this much slack. Any takers?
2. AFIO National has adopted a Code of Ethics to which every Officer, Director and Member is expected to subscribe. A copy is attached to this email (or included in the postal mailings). Please read and heed. We do not anticipate that any AFIO member will have issues with any of these requirements. Please note, in particular, the paragraphs on using AFIO as a platform to further "personal, political policy, religious, or social agendas," and on the use of the AFIO logo, and the requirement to honor the "not for attribution"/"off the record" ground rules with speakers.

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Pete Bostwick - President
 (Vacant) - 1st Vice President, Programs
 Jerry Monahan – 2nd Vice President, Public Relations
 Brendan O'Donovan (On Leave) – Secretary, Newsletter
 Judith Mead – Treasurer