

13 August 2012

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NATIONAL RECONNAISSANCE OFFICE

14875 Lee Road

Chantilly, VA 20151-1715

07 01 2009

Office of the
Principal Deputy Director

25 September 2009

MEMORANDUM FOR DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE

SUBJECT: ~~(S//TK//NF)~~ Approval to Declassify "Fact of" QUILL as Radar Imager

~~(S//TK//NF)~~ Action Requested: Concurrence with my decision to declassify the "fact of" QUILL as an NRO radar imager.

~~(S//TK//NF)~~ Background: QUILL was an experimental Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) satellite, based on the Corona satellite and available SAR hardware, which flew in 1964. Because of diplomatic and security concerns, the brief mission imaged only selected targets within the United States. Those targets could be inspected on the ground to validate the intelligence value of orbital SAR without alerting the Soviets to the capability or touching off diplomatic protests over active illumination of sovereign territory. The mission provided proof-of-concept, but development of the first operational SAR system proceeded slowly. Much of the technology and basic science behind QUILL is already known to the general public.

~~(S//TK//NF)~~ The National Reconnaissance Office (NRO) has received an immediate Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request for information about "a satellite program called QUILL, and/or information regarding a satellite launched on 21 December 1964 (from Vandenberg AFB, California) and given the designator 1964087A." Because the program and information this request specifies currently remain classified, we cannot comply with the provisions of the FOIA, including the acknowledgment of documents or its mandated release timeline, without my declassification decision and your concurrence.

~~(S//TK//NF)~~ I am advised that we cannot legally maintain classification of the term "QUILL" and of the fact that it is a radar imager. First, the short-lived program ended 45 years

DECL ON: 25X1, 20590910, RRG dated July 2005
DRV FROM: NCG 5.0, 21 May 2005

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ago, and it would be extremely difficult to argue that its disclosure would cause harm to national security. Second, on 10 April 2008, Director of National Intelligence McConnell approved the NRO's plan to declassify the general "fact of" NRO radar satellite reconnaissance, although QUILL specifically remained classified at that time. Finally, without association with QUILL, the Air Force declassified the Side Looking Mapping Radar payload used by QUILL. Given these facts, I have decided to declassify the "fact of" QUILL and the "fact" that it was a radar imager experiment in response to the current FOIA request.

~~(S//TK//NF)~~ Recommendation: With your concurrence, we will acknowledge the existence of QUILL and treat documents accordingly in response to the immediate FOIA request.

Betty J. Sapp
~~Betty J. Sapp~~
Betty J. Sapp

CC:
Director, National
Geospatial-Intelligence Agency

CONCUR:

Dennis C. Blair
Director of National Intelligence

Date