



~~TOP SECRET~~

HANDLE VIA (b)(1)1.5c

CONTROL SYSTEM

THE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

**OX CART**

November 11, 1967

Dear Don:

This is in reply to your letter of October 13, 1967 reviewing the status of our decision to defer OXCART phase-out.

(b)(1)1.5c

Your letter summarizes very well the issues you raised at the September 29, 1967 meeting of the ExCom. I believe we agreed that some further study was required to answer specifically the technical and operational questions which were brought up at that meeting. I have asked Dr. Flax to coordinate the collection and presentation of data for presentation to the ExCom. The necessary information is being developed by the CIA for the OXCART and by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Air Force for the SR-71. NPIC, CIA and DIA are being asked to participate in the evaluation of sensor performance. Dr. Flax will provide to you a summary of the actions being taken to obtain as nearly comparable data as possible on the two aircraft. He will also respond to your specific comments and suggestions regarding the guidelines and ground rules for the comparisons to be made.

As to the political factors you mention, I believe there are opposing factors which weigh in favor of the use of the SR-71 rather than the OXCART, when one considers the types of operations which are actually likely to be conducted. No United States civilian manned overflight of denied territory has been authorized since 1960. The reason for the OXCART's being employed over North Vietnam is not because this area is considered a denied territory requiring covert reconnaissance, but rather because of the combination of mission capability and low vulnerability to (b)(1)1.5g which are possessed by this aircraft. For the types of missions being performed, these qualities make the OXCART and the SR-71 superior in major degree to the theater tactical reconnaissance assets. North Vietnam is a theater of military operations. Hundreds of tactical aircraft overfly this area every week and some are shot down and their military crews captured. The loss of an SR-71 and the capture of its military crew, although we would seek to minimize the probability of such an event, as

**OX CART**

HANDLE VIA (b)(1)1.5c  
CONTROL SYSTEM

~~TOP SECRET~~

Copy 11 of        Copies  
Page 1 of 2 Pages.

Control No. (b)(1)1.5-2528-67

#48

OXCART

we seek to minimize losses of all United States aircraft, would not create any new political situation -- the loss of an OXCART with a supposedly civilian pilot would. Although the purpose of the BLACK SHIELD deployment was to ascertain whether (b)(1)1.5c were being emplaced in North Vietnam, the value of the intelligence collected has been primarily with respect to the tactical situation. Air Force studies over the past several years have shown the value of aircraft like the OXCART and the SR-71 for tactical operations as well as for trans and post-attack reconnaissance. I, therefore, feel that, on both operational and political grounds, the substitution of the SR-71 for the OXCART in Southeast Asia is highly desirable and should be accomplished as soon as feasible.

My concurrence in the action to delay OXCART phase-out for several months was based on the rationale expressed at the ExCom meeting that North Vietnamese defense reaction was just beginning to develop, that the OXCART had available one more (b)(1)1.5c technique (the precise value of which is not firmly established but which does offer some additional insurance) than was currently available on the SR-71 in the interim (b)(1)1.5c configuration, and that, if OXCART experience over the next several months indicated a need to reconfigure the SR-71 (b)(1)1.5c it would be both more prudent and more efficient to do so before SR-71 deployment.

The broader issues involved in the phasing out of the OXCART aircraft were addressed in the Bureau of the Budget/Department of Defense/Central Intelligence Agency study of December 1966. I see nothing that has occurred during the past year which alters any of the fundamental premises of the study. Barring some unexpected development in the operation over the next two or three months, and assuming that the adequacy of (b)(1)1.5c on the SR-71 can be demonstrated, we will proceed with the OXCART phase-out on March 31, 1968. In the interim, the number of operational OXCART aircraft will be reduced by December 31, 1967 to the minimum necessary to support the BLACK SHIELD operation. It appears that five operational aircraft should be adequate for this purpose and I have, after discussion with the Director of the Budget and the Director of Central Intelligence, directed

~~TOP SECRET~~

~~TOP SECRET~~

HANDLE VIA (b)(1)1.5c

CONTROL SYSTEM

**OXCART**

that action be taken to reduce the inventory of operational OXCART aircraft to this number.

Sincerely,

~~Paul H. Nitze~~

Honorable Donald F. Hornig  
Special Assistant to the President  
for Science & Technology  
Executive Office Building  
Washington, D. C.

**OXCART**

HANDLE VIA (b)(1)1.5c

CONTROL SYSTEM

~~TOP SECRET~~

Copy \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ Copies  
Page 3 of 3 Pages.

Control No. (b)(1) 57828-6