Lockheed Martin's Skunk Works Celebrates Diamond Anniversary

PRNewswire-FirstCall
PALMDALE, Calif.

Lockheed Martin's renowned Skunk Works officially marks its 60th Anniversary today. Once the informal name for the Lockheed organization led by Clarence L. "Kelly" Johnson that produced many of America's most technologically advanced aircraft, the Skunk Works has made an indelible mark on aviation history. The Skunk Works is regarded worldwide as one of the most respected design and development names in aeronautics.

During the heat of World War II, Johnson, Lockheed's famed aircraft designer, forged a team of engineers behind tightly closed doors in makeshift facilities in Burbank, Calif., and designed and developed the P-80 Shooting Star, the Air Force's first truly operational jet fighter, in a mere 143 days.

Since then, this organization continues within Lockheed Martin and has given shape to many "firsts" such as the F-104 Starfighter, the first Mach 2 aircraft; the U-2 reconnaissance aircraft, which is still the highest flying single engine airplane; and the SR-71 "Blackbird" reconnaissance aircraft, which was the first to fly at speeds in excess of Mach 3. The SR-71, which has been retired, is still the highest flying and fastest jet aircraft ever developed.

The Skunk Works is also responsible for development of the F-117 Nighthawk, the world's first operational stealth fighter, and led development of the YF-22 Advanced Tactical Fighter, the forerunner of today's F/A-22 Raptor, the first aircraft to combine stealth, supercruise, super maneuverability, and highly integrated avionics.

More recently, the Skunk Works led the development and flight testing of the Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, BAE Systems X-35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) prototypes. Included in this effort was the successful flight testing of the innovative lift fan system on the X-35B demonstrator. The successful testing of this revolutionary vertical landing capability was a key factor in the Lockheed Martin team's win in the JSF competition. With production of the F-35 aircraft scheduled to last for four decades, the JSF program will likely be the largest defense contract in history.

How did the Skunk Works name come into being? The actual facts have been veiled by time. But there is no doubt that it was derived from the "Skonk Works" in Al Capp's popular 1940s-era "Li'l Abner" comic strip that appeared in newspapers nationwide. It is believed that Irv Culver, a talented designer who worked on Johnson's original 1943 P-80 development team was responsible for the name.

Johnson, who died in 1990, noted in his autobiography, "The legend goes that one of our engineers -- I guess it was Culver -- was asked 'What is Kelly doing in there?' He's stirring up some kind of brew,' was the answer. This brought to mind Li'l Abner and the hairy Indian in that strip who regularly stirred up a big brew, throwing in skunks, old shoes and other material to make his 'Kickapoo joy juice.'"

Culver's version differs. He recalled that World War II secrecy dictated that Lockheed engineers could not even identify their office when answering the phone. The isolation reminded him of the much-shunned Kickapoo joy juice works in the comic strip. So one day when a group of Pentagon military officers placed a conference call, he answered, "Skonk Works, inside man, Culver." After an awkward pause one of the officers asked, "What?" Culver repeated, "Skonk Works," and the name stuck.

Nestled in the fringes of California's Mojave Desert, Advanced Development Programs (a.k.a. The Skunk Works) today continues its notable tradition by developing transformational strategies and classified products in a "quick", "quiet" and "quality" manner to support its varied customers. It continues to "brew" up new innovations that are and will serve our nation's defense for decades to come. The Skunk Works unique unmanned products, i.e. Desert Hawk and FPASS recently saw action in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

Frank Cappuccio is the current Vice President and General Manager of the "Skunk Works". Frank started his Lockheed Martin career in the Skunk Works and is committed to keeping this national asset in the forefront of aeronautical technology and products. His vision, like Kelly Johnson's is simple: Superior products through innovation.

Lockheed Martin Aeronautics Co., headquartered in Fort Worth, Texas, is a leader in the design, development, systems integration, production and support of advanced military aircraft and related technologies. Its customers include the military services of the United States and allied countries throughout the world. Products include the F-

16, F/A-22, F-35 JSF, F-117, T-50, C-5, C-130, C-130J, P-3, S-3 and U-2.

Headquartered in Bethesda, Md., Lockheed Martin employs about 125,000 people worldwide and is principally engaged in the research, design, development, manufacture and integration of advanced technology systems, products and services. The corporation reported 2002 sales of $26.6 billion.

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