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Pentagon-Industry Research Shuttle

By Drew Pearson and Jack Anderson

NEW EVIDENCE is turning up every day that defense contracts are costing billions more than the taxpayers bargained for. Additional billions are lavished on armaments that should have been scrapped or never built in the first place.

These costly weapons systems are hatched in the Pentagon's research and development section, which, amazingly, has been overlooked in all the uproar over defense boondoggles. Yet the millions spent on research determine how many billions will be spent on production.

These multibillion-dollar decisions are made largely by industry men who are given a leave of absence by their companies to serve in the Pentagon. They don't come to Washington as consultants but as policymakers who decide what weapons the military-industrial complex should develop.

The $64-billion question is whether they push weapons that are best for the country or for their companies—whether they are ruled by patriotism or profit.

IN LATE 1963, for example, the research chiefs developed the idea of orbiting a manned laboratory. Astronauts working in their shirtsleeves would be able to keep a photographic and electronic eye upon Russia from high in space.

This developed into a 1965 production contract that was supposed to cost the taxpayers $2 billion. But the estimated cost soared to $3 billion before President Nixon canceled it last month. Unfortunately, the cancellation came too late to save $1.5 billion that had already gone down the Pentagon drain.

In a private Pentagon conversation in May, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird told this column that the Manned Orbiting Laboratory (MOL) was vital to our security. About four weeks ago, he drafted a statement to deliver before the Senate Appropriations Committee justifying the project.

This raises some obvious questions: (1) If the MOL was essential to our security four weeks ago, why is it now being scrapped? and (2) if it isn't essential, why did we spend $1.5 billion before canceling it?

LIKE THE MOL, the antiballistic missile system also began as a Pentagon research project. Now that it is ready to go into production, some experts are questioning whether it, too, will be worth the tremendous expenditure.

Both the MOL and ABM concepts were developed while Daniel Fink was the Pentagon's deputy research director in charge of strategic and space systems. After the ABM moved out of the research stage in 1967, Fink resigned to go to work for General Electric, which happens to be one of the ABM contractors.

Fink came back to Washington the other day, as one of the fathers of the ABM research, to tell the Senate Foreign Relations Committee how essential the ABM system is. Some skeptics wonder whether he believes it is more essential to the United States or to General Electric.

The Pentagon research chiefs, who are borrowed from defense contractors, usually believe in the weapons they promote. They push for expensive new weapons in all sincerity, genuinely believing them to be in the national interest.

Usually, a research executive from industry spends two or three years as a Pentagon policymaker, then returns to industry to work on the contracts he helped generate in the Pentagon. Thus, both his past and future belong to the armaments industry—an arrangement hardly calculated to gain his first loyalty for the taxpayers.

Many of the big defense contractors have succeeded in planting men inside the Pentagon in positions to guide weapons research. At least two other GE men, Arthur Robinson and Burton Brown, served as assistant research directors in the early 1960s. Robinson was in charge of international programs, Brown in charge of air defense research. Both returned to GE after their Pentagon stints.

LOCKHEED, now in hot water over the failures of its Cheyenne helicopter program and the soaring costs of its C5A cargo plane contract, planted Robert Gibson in the Pentagon as an assistant research director in 1965. He returned to Lockheed last year. Another Lockheed man, Lloyd Wilson, served as deputy director of strategic and space research from 1966 until this year. He was picked up after his Pentagon service, however, by Brush Beryllium.

Martin Marietta, a big missile-space contractor, put Albert Hall in the Pentagon as deputy director of space research in 1963, then brought him back to the company in 1965. He was immediately replaced by another Martin Marietta man, John Kirk, who is still serving as assistant director of space technology. Martin Marietta also picked up Fred Payne, originally from North American Aviation, after he had served a year as deputy research director for strategic and space systems.

Bendix's assistant manager in charge of Government projects, Grogan Shelor, spent a couple years in the Pentagon as an assistant research director. Another Bendix man, Russell O'Neal, took a leave of absence to serve briefly as Assistant Secretary of the Army in charge of research and development.

The giant IBM sent Eugene Fubini to serve as Assistant Secretary of Defense in charge of research and engineering in the early 1960s. Gardiner Tucker, now a deputy research director, also came from IBM.

Ronald Murray was given a three-year leave of absence from Hughes Tool to serve as an assistant research director. Dave Heebner, another Hughes Tool man, came to the Pentagon last year as an assistant research director. And James Drake, originally from Marquardt, did research on the Maverick air-to-ground missile in the Pentagon, then went to Hughes Tool to become project manager of the Maverick contract.

Most of these research specialists, incidentally, have continued to serve as Pentagon consultants after returning to their companies.