
Meet the Staff at ORBIMAGE:

A Friendly Crew of "Missile Defense" Advocates who sell Canada's RADARSAT Images to U.S. Warriors and Spies

In 1998, ORBIMAGE began hiring a coterie of retired U.S. military officers including some champions of the "missile defense" weapons program. Among their responsibilities was selling data from RADARSAT-1 and -2.

ORBIMAGE has been selling RADARSAT-1 images to U.S. clients since buying those rights from MacDonald, Dettwiler and Assoc. in 1999. Between 1998 and 2003, ORBIMAGE was the

only firm allowed to sell RADARSAT-2 data to U.S. buyers. In fact, between 1998 and 2001, their exclusive license covered all RADARSAT-2 sales outside Canada. Both firms were then owned by Orbital Sciences, a U.S. "missile defense" contractor. (See p.29.)

In Jan. 2006, ORBIMAGE acquired another firm, rebranded itself GeoEye and became "the world's largest commercial satellite imagery company."

James Alan Abrahamson, Air Force Lieutenant General (retired)

For decades, the now-retired U.S. Air Force (USAF) Lt. General James Abrahamson, led the charge for "missile defense." He joined ORBIMAGE's board of directors in 1998, the same year that it acquired control of RADARSAT-2 data sales to U.S. customers. By November 2001, he was Chairman of ORBIMAGE.¹

Before that, Abrahamson had a long and "distinguished military career"² with such accomplishments as flying "49 combat missions over Southeast Asia."³ He eventually became the "Project Manager for Maverick guided missiles, Director of the multinational F-16 program, [and] Associate Administrator of Space Flight for NASA where he ran the Space Shuttle program for three years."⁴

Abrahamson also had an early and pre-eminent role in boosting the "missile defense" weapons program. According to Dr. Donald Baucom, the official historian of the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization, Abrahamson was instrumental in several milestones in the history of "missile defense":

- Abrahamson became the first Director of the Strategic Defense Initiative Organization (SDIO) on March 27, 1984, when appointed by President Ronald Reagan's Secretary of Defense, Caspar Weinberger.
- In December of 1985, "a study of the SDIO organization and manpower situation" that "was commissioned by General Abrahamson" "found that SDIO was 'critically short of the

people and skills required to carry out the responsibilities'.... To overcome these difficulties, [this study recommended that the] SDIO should reorganize and establish a Federally Funded Research Center."

- In July 1986, Abrahamson "directed that SDIO be reorganized based upon the...Study of SDIO's organizational requirements [that was commissioned by Abrahamson]."⁵

As might be expected, following his January-1989 retirement from the job of SDIO director,⁶ Abrahamson began juggling several "missile defense"-related postings to corporations. For instance, he "served as a senior executive at Hughes Aircraft Corporation"⁷ which is a well-known, U.S. war-related, aerospace firm that has—like so many others—done well feeding from the "missile defense" trough.

When Abrahamson became chair of ORBIMAGE in 1998, he continued serving as Chair of Stratcom International, which he founded in 1998. This company has long partnered with the world's top war industry, Lockheed Martin. In 2003, Team Lockheed Martin, including StratCom, won a US\$40 million, Missile Defense Agency contract to develop High Altitude Airships for "missile defense" applications.⁸

Abrahamson is also a senior investor and partner in a private-equity fund called Crescent Investment Management (CIM). It is described as a "hedge fund...which focuses on national security technologies"⁹ and a



First Director,
Strategic Defense
Initiative Organization
(now called the
Missile Defense Agency)

"global investment advisor and bank."¹⁰ One of CIM's top directors is James Woolsey, former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (1993-1995).¹¹

The founder and chairman of CIM is Mansoor Ijaz, a "member of the Council on Foreign Relations" and self-professed expert on many financial and political issues, who claims to have "negotiated Sudan's counterterrorism offer to the Clinton administration."¹²

"Ijaz says he attempted to broker a hand-over of Osama bin Laden from the government of the Sudan to the U.S. in 1996, since then he has criticized the Clinton National Security team of having failed to get their man.... This [led] right wing press to lay blame on Clinton *et al* for having failed to fight terrorism."¹³

Clinton's National Security Advisor, Samuel Berger, had a different story saying "Ijaz was unreliable because of his oil investment interests in Sudan."¹⁴

Regardless of this and other controversies, Ijaz is highly regarded by many corporate media outlets that provide him a platform, such as:

"CNN, CNNI, Fox News...Germany's

ARD TV, Japan's NHK, ABC and NBC....[and] the editorial pages of London's *Financial Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*, *International Herald Tribune*, *Newsweek International*, *Christian Science Monitor*,...*National Review* [and] *USA Today*."¹⁵

Ijaz's CIM is one of the "key partners" in an Israeli investment com-

pany called the Alliance Stars Group (ASG). Other "key partners" of ASG have included

- Kissinger McLarty Associates
- Kissinger Associates
- Project for the New American Century
- The Rockefeller Foundation¹⁶

In May 2004, the ASG website described CIM as being involved in a "multi-year program to improve U.S.

Homeland and Global security through...projects [including]...satellite imaging and dirigible-based telecommunications platforms."¹⁷

This reference to dirigibles and "Homeland and Global security... projects" probably refers to Abrahamson's company, StratCom International, and its partnership with Lockheed Martin to build High Altitude Airships for the Missile Defense Agency.

Gary Payton, Air Force Colonel (retired)

Another "missile defense"-promoting USAF veteran, who landed a top executive position at ORBIMAGE, was Gary Payton. This retired Air Force Colonel became ORBIMAGE's Vice President for Engineering and Operations in July 2000. His main responsibility was the "management and direction of ORBIMAGE's satellite operations and engineering departments."¹⁸

During his two year stint at ORBIMAGE, the company had exclusive rights to sell RADARSAT-1 and -2 data to the U.S. government. What qualified Payton for this work? Payton had a life-long career in the U.S. military. In 1967, he entered the Air Force academy and received his master of science degree in astronautical and aeronautical engineering five years later.¹⁹

Payton's official Air Force biography says he was awarded a Vietnam Service Medal. This means he served in Vietnam, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia "or contiguous waters and airspace" sometime between 1965 and 1973.²⁰

In 1973, he graduated from pilot training at Craig Air Force Base (AFB) in Alabama and became an instructor pilot there. Between 1976 and 1980, he was a spacecraft test controller at Florida's Cape Canaveral. In 1980, he was selected for the USAF Manned Space Flight Engineer Program and five years later he was the "payload specialist" aboard the STS-51C *Discovery*. This space flight "was the first dedicated Space Shuttle Department of Defense [DoD] mission."²¹ This made Payton "the first DoD astronaut to fly on the U.S. Space Shuttle *Discovery*."²²

Between 1986 and 1995, Payton served in a variety of postings that directly served the cause of "missile defense." For instance, between 1986 and

1990, he was the Assistant Deputy for Technology and executive officer to the Director of the Strategic Defense Initiative Organization (SDIO). It is the "missile defense" organization set up to fulfil what became known as President Reagan's "Star Wars" initiative.²³

Payton was the Director of Theater Missile Defense Sensors²⁴ and, between 1992 and 1994, he was Deputy for Technology at the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization (BMDO).²⁵

Between 1995 and 2000, Payton entered a new phase in his career, working directly for NASA. Based at their headquarters in Washington, D.C., he was their Deputy Associate Administrator for Space Launch Technology.²⁶

All of this experience was apparently excellent training for Payton's job at ORBIMAGE, which he held between 2000 and 2002. When hired, the company's President and CEO at the time, Gil Rye, was quoted as saying:

"We are excited to have Gary Payton join us.... He has significant experience with NASA and the Department of Defense, who are key customers for our imagery products and services. Gary's technical management expertise and leadership skills will benefit our satellite and production operations as we prepare for the next phase of our business."²⁷

After two years with ORBIMAGE, Payton returned to the U.S. military establishment. He went straight into the Missile Defense Agency and became their Deputy for Advanced Systems (2002-2005). He then led the "technology program to enhance ballistic missile defense sensor, weapon and battle management capabilities."²⁸

Then, in 2005, he became the Deputy Undersecretary of the Air Force



- Assistant Deputy for Technology, Strategic Defense Initiative Organization
- Deputy for Technology, Ballistic Missile Defense Organization
- Deputy for Advanced Systems, Missile Defense Agency
- Deputy Undersecretary, Air Force for Space Programs

for Space Programs. Here's what this current job involves:

"He provides guidance, direction and oversight for the formulation, review and execution of military space programs. This includes oversight of all space and space-related acquisition plans, strategies and assessments for research, development, test, evaluation and space-related industrial base issues."²⁹

During Payton's entire 33-year work history, his two years at ORBIMAGE was the only period that he spent outside the military—if that is, you can consider working at ORBIMAGE to be outside the military's sphere.

Gilbert Rye, Air Force Colonel (retired)

After welcoming Gary Payton onboard in 2000, Gil Rye was moved up to become ORB-IMAGE's Vice Chairman in November 2001.³⁰ Like Payton and Abrahamson, Rye also had a previous life in the U.S. Air Force. And, like them, he was also involved in promoting the U.S. "missile defense" weapons development program. In fact, Colonel Rye was a key figure in the struggle to push "missile defense" when the effort was called the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI).

Rye was a staff member of the National Security Council (NSC) during President Ronald Reagan's first and second terms. Rye was on the NSC's Intelligence committee in 1982 and 1983, and was its Director of Space Programs in 1984 and 1985.³¹ He used his influential position there to play

"a leading role in initiating the 'Star Wars' missile defense program.... [But], to Rye's dismay, the United States still has no workable shield against missiles."³²

It was, in fact, during Rye's time on the NSC that the phrase "Star Wars" was first hitched to what people now refer to as "missile defense." Rye certainly knows a thing or two about Reagan and, particularly, his infamous "Star Wars" speech of March 23, 1983.³³ That's when Reagan dramatically addressed the U.S. television public and stirred their imagination with the fanciful idea that the U.S. could build a space shield to stop Soviet missiles. Gil Rye's little-known claim to fame is that "he was a drafter of the President's 'Star Wars' speech."³⁴

Rye is much better known however as having been

"instrumental in President Reagan's approval of the U.S. Space Station Program and various space-related intelligence programs."³⁵

An official NASA-history document records the following about Rye's role at the NSC:

"Responsible for space policy matters within the National Security Council staff at this time was Gil Rye, an Air Force colonel who had worked on space issues within the Pentagon before being detailed to the White House.... Having Rye as an

ally in the White House proved invaluable to NASA."³⁶

Rye's contributions to Reagan's heady "Space and Intelligence" efforts were the culmination of his 25-year military career. From about 1960, when he joined up, until his retirement from direct military service in 1985,

"Rye was an officer in the U.S. Air Force serving in various planning, project management and policy positions related to systems procurement and space and intelligence policy/planning. His last assignment before retirement in 1985 was as Director of Space and Intelligence Programs on the National Security Council in President Reagan's White House. In this position, Mr. Rye oversaw the civil, commercial and national security sectors of the U.S. space program, as well as providing support to the President on various technical intelligence matters."³⁷

Clearly, Rye's contributions to the military and intelligence communities, did not end in 1985. He went on to serve these previous masters during a no-less-illustrious career in the corporate world. Before joining ORBIMAGE in 1992, Rye worked for two private companies largely devoted to facilitating access to satellite data for U.S. military and intelligence agencies.

For instance, between 1985 and 1988, Rye was the president of COMSAT Government Systems, a "systems integration contractor" selling "turn-key, satellite-based communications systems to the U.S. and foreign governments."³⁸

From there, he went over to BDM International, Inc., and was their Senior Vice President for Space Systems and Technology (1988-1990).

"Here he supervised over 300 people and four regional offices that provided technical consulting services to the intelligence community, other government agencies and the private sector."³⁹

BDM was later caught in the centre of a legal battle over "missile defense" contracts. In 1998, the U.S. government's Federal Trade Commission (FTC) laid charges against BDM's parent company, one of America's largest



- Director of the National Security Council's Space and Intelligence programs for President Reagan
- Played "a leading role in initiating the 'Star Wars'" weapons program
- Drafted President Reagan's infamous "Star Wars" speech of March 23, 1983.

military corporations, TRW. In order to settle the charges against it,

"TRW Inc. agreed to divest a portion of the systems engineering and technical assistance (SETA) operations of McLean, Virginia-based BDM International prior to completing the [US]\$942 million acquisition of the company. In its complaint, the FTC stated that TRW's acquisition of BDM would substantially lessen competition in the market for research, development, manufacture and sale of a Ballistic Missile Defense System.

BDM...serves the [U.S.] Department of Defense [DoD], international defense agencies...and commercial clients. [In] 1996, the company acquired CW Systems, IG Systems, Melco Systems, Advanced Systems Design, RGTI Systems and Software Engineering.

TRW...and BDM were each involved in the DoD's Ballistic Missile Defense program. The United Missile Defense Corp., a joint venture including TRW, was one of two competitors for the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization [BMDO] Lead Systems Integrator contract. BDM is the BMDO's sole supplier of SETA services for the LSI program."⁴⁰

Gary Adkins, Air Force (retired)

Yet another former military man employed at ORBIMAGE is Gary Adkins, a retired “Air Force cartographer who heads ORBIMAGE’s government sales.”⁴¹ He became the company’s vice president of Federal Sales and National Security Programs in February 2003.⁴²

After 20 years in the Air Force, where he “held several technical and management positions related to the use of remote sensing,”⁴³ Adkins worked for Space Imaging Corp., Laser-Scan and the Geodynamics Corp.⁴⁴ While at these firms, he was in charge of “program management, business development, marketing and sales, and corporate management.”⁴⁵

When Adkin’s joined ORBIMAGE’s “senior marketing staff,” he was praised as “an experienced veteran in the remote sensing industry with a proven track record in federal sales.” ORBIMAGE expected him to help lead “marketing pursuits for the sale of its satellite imagery products...to the

Federal and National Security government sectors.”⁴⁶

These are, of course, ORBIMAGE’s most important sales sectors. War is good for the satellite business. The Iraq war in particular has even made it difficult for ORBIMAGE to meet demands:

“Commercial satellite imagery operators...are benefiting from the U.S. military operations in the [Mid East] under their Nextview contract with the U.S. National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency. Military operations in Iraq, as well as political situations in Iran and Syria, are driving a good percentage of the business for ORBIMAGE, says Gary Adkins.”⁴⁷

Adkins was on the planning committee of a conference in Washington, D.C. (May 13-15, 2003) that included discussions about the importance of commercial satellites in providing data for military, including “missile defense” functions. One of the speakers at that conference was a fellow U.S. Air Force officer, Lt. Col. Max



Air Force cartographer with a 20-year military career.

Clayton, Chief of Space Policy, Space and Missile Defense Policy Division, Deputy Directorate for Strategy and Policy, U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS).⁴⁸

It was something of a coup to get a speaker of Clayton’s rank at this “Commercial Satellite Remote Sensing Symposium,” because the JCS is America’s highest-ranked military organisation, composed of the Chiefs of the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps.⁴⁹ The JCS’s chairman is the top “military advisor to the President, the Secretary of Defense and the National Security Council.”⁵⁰

Bill Schuster, CIA officer (retired)

In November of 2004, ORBIMAGE hired William Schuster as its Chief Operating Officer to “manage their operations.” The company’s media release proudly highlighted that he

“began his professional career with the Central Intelligence Agency [CIA] where he spent nearly twenty-two years. Upon his departure from the CIA, he was recognized by Secretary of Defense, William Perry, for the pivotal role that he played in the conceptualization, development and operation of several National Reconnaissance Systems.”⁶¹

While embedded in the CIA, Schuster was kept busy in many “engineering and management positions, designing in-house, quick-reaction operational support and surveillance systems. Later, he became the project manager and contracting officers’ technical representative for more complex projects. During the last 14 years of his CIA career, he worked with national systems and received the Intelligence Medal of Merit.”⁶²

Although it is said that no one ever leaves the CIA, Schuster left “The Company” in 1995 and went to work for several large, war industries, including Lockheed Martin, BAE Systems, Harris and Loral Space and Range Systems.⁶² Each of these weapons makers have their fingers deep in the rich, “missile defense” pie.

When Schuster joined ORBIMAGE, Matt O’Connell, the company’s CEO, commented: “These are exciting times for ORBIMAGE.”⁶⁴

No doubt part of the excitement about having people like Schuster—and other former military and intelligence officials—working within the ORBIMAGE family, is that they have the contacts, knowledge and skills that are needed to get lucrative contracts with the DoD, CIA and other U.S. institutions of war.

As Schuster himself has conceded, after ORBIMAGE landed a half-billion-dollar deal with the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA)



This 22-year veteran of the CIA worked on National Reconnaissance Systems and received the Intelligence Medal of Merit.

in 2004, the usefulness of contract wranglers, like Schuster, also has to do with the common “language” that these men share with their customers.

“By speaking the same language as the NGA and intelligence personnel, we can facilitate their requests so that they get precisely what they need to fulfil their mission requirements,” Schuster said.”⁶⁵

John G. Zierdt, Jr., Army Brigadier General (retired)

In 2002, when Orbital Sciences (the parent company of ORBIMAGE and the former parent of MacDonald, Dettwiler and Assoc.) won a four-year, US\$400-million “missile defense” contract from Boeing, it proudly announced it was hiring a former U.S. Army Brigadier General named John Zierdt, Jr.

Orbital brought the retired general on board as vice president in charge of their operations in Huntsville, Alabama. That’s where the work on their “missile defense” weapons contract was being performed. Zierdt then began supervising Orbital’s work on

“the deployment, training and sustainment elements of the Ground-based Midcourse Defense [GMD] System boost vehicle program.”⁵¹

According to Boeing, the prime contractor for the GMD, this system is the “key component of the Missile Defense Agency’s overall layered ballistic missile defense architecture.”⁵²

Zierdt came to this “missile defense” job along a circuitous and controversial route. In 1995, after retiring from the military, he shifted gears and became president and CEO of TransCor America Inc., “the largest privately run prison transport company” in the U.S..⁵³ It controls 85% of the American convict-moving market; transporting about 75,000 prisoners annually.⁵⁴

In 1997, three prisoners being bussed by Transcor escaped during a Burger King break in Owatonna, Minnesota. One of them, Homer Land, held a local couple hostage for 15 hours. Then, in 1999, when a “convicted child killer” escaped from a TransCor bus “hours before guards even noticed he was missing,” Zierdt Jr. reluctantly said “several procedural violations have occurred involving security policies.... We are embarrassed by this incident.”⁵⁵

Transcor is a symbol of what privatisation can do, besides pouring money into private corporations:

“All told, at least 25 convicts have escaped from TransCor vehicles....

Nearly a dozen more have escaped from other for-profit firms. Reported escapes over the same period during transit by the U.S. Marshals Service, which moves more than



twice as many prisoners as private firms every year: zero.”⁵⁶

In 2000, Zierdt, Jr. finally resigned from TransCor. There were just too many scandals arising from the company’s repeated inability to keep prisoners inside their buses.⁵⁷

John Zierdt, Sr.

Long before joining Orbital, or catching media flack for prisoner escapes, the name John Zierdt was well known within the “missile defense” community. That’s because his father was a famous Major-General whose name and personality is closely entwined with U.S. “missile” history and folklore.

Zierdt Sr. had the dubious honour of being “inducted into the U.S. Army Ordnance Hall of Fame” in 1981. Between 1958 and 1967, he held several top positions within the Army Bal-

listic Missile Agency, the Army Ordnance Missile Command and the Army Rocket and Guided Missile Agency.⁵⁸

Zierdt Sr. even had occasion to work with such legendary “Americans” as Dr. Wernher Von Braun. He was Nazi Germany’s top weapons scientist. Like many others of his ilk, he carried on his war efforts at NASA in the U.S.. On January 1, 1964, when John Zierdt, Sr., was promoted to Major General, he was congratulated by Von Braun.⁵⁹ (See photo, below.) Zierdt’s illustrious career culminated as Commanding General of U.S. Army Missile Command.⁶⁰

Zierdt Sr. died in 2000, a few months before his son’s embarrassing resignation from TransCor. That was also before junior joined Orbital’s “missile defense” efforts. No doubt the senior Zierdt would have been proud. One wonders however whether Zierdt Jr’s role at Orbital will ever be associated with the kind of privatisation-related debacle that was endured by TansCor.

Of course a single, major U.S. weapons system using data from a privatised Canadian satellite, like RADARSAT, could easily cause more destruction than the 25 prisoners who escaped from Zierdt’s buses. However, the corporate media will not likely ever attribute any share of the blame to RADARSAT just because thousands of Iraqi or Afghan civilians are killed by weapons systems which—through ORBIMAGE—use data collected by Canada’s privatised satellites.



(Jan. 1, 1964) NASA's top rocket scientist, Dr. Wernher Von Braun (left), a “retired” Nazi weapons crusader, congratulates John Zierdt, Sr., when he became a Major General (as Mrs. Zierdt and Mrs. Von Braun look away.).

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