

Declassified Military Operations

Copyright 2022 Shane Rogers
Entertainment

Midnight Facts for Insomniacs

Podcast Transcript

(Note: transcript consists of episode outline)

I've typically been waiting until the end of the episode to shout out new patrons, but I really want to highlight these Insomniacs because their support is so vital when it comes to keeping this show going, so this week I'm going to do it right up front if you're ok with that.

So welcome New Patrons: Evana, very cool name. A brand new midnight minion. And Laura, who actually joined a couple weeks ago. Last time we had a Lori, now Laura. We're very popular with Lors. Also Emma, yet another midnight minion I believe from England. And finally Rebecca.

Welcome Rebecca, and thank you so much to all the patrons, the midnight minions, menaces, and maniacs, we love doing this show and you are the reason this show can continue so you're the MVPs and we truly do appreciate you and of course the discord crew as well.

And now let's get to this week's topic: Declassified military operations. These are sketchy operations that were formerly top secret, until the government was either forced to disclose the truth or did it voluntarily because enough time had passed that no one had to worry about getting in trouble. As far as I can tell that's the criteria that covert agencies use to determine when it's ok to release secrets. The decision process goes something like this:

1. has the statute of limitations expired, and or has everyone involved in the shady operation expired? If the answer is yes, then 2. Is there anyone on earth who would face any shred of accountability, however trivial, for unethical behavior? If the answer is no then 3., would declassifying the information inconvenience the individual in charge of *deciding* to declassify this information in any way whatsoever? If the answer to that final question is also no, then the agency will cheerfully provide approximately 50,000 indecipherable pages of heavily redacted legalese for some underpaid journalist to spend the next seven months trying to decode. Welcome to government transparency.

Obviously that's a bit of an exaggeration; but in general none of the acronym agencies are going to voluntarily divulge embarrassing information until that information is no longer relevant. It's just basic self preservation. Of course another form of self-preservation would be *not*

engaging in shady behavior to begin with, but that option has historically proven less popular. Much easier to just do sketchy shit and then quietly admit to it decades later when no one who would care is still breathing. Most of the documents and operations that we're going to discuss would have been hugely scandalous in their day, but now they're just footnotes in history that most people have never heard of, because the government is very good at being very bad.

Project Iceworm

Let's start in a polar region, always among our favorite locations on this podcast. We're beginning near the *north* pole, thank God, no ponies involved. This is in fact about as far from the traumatic pony debacle as you can travel while remaining on planet earth, and that makes me happy because "as far from pony murder as possible" is pretty much where I always want to be.

In November 1960, a 17-year-old Eagle Scout and choir boy named Kent Goering from Kansas was selected from among hundreds of applicants to spend almost half a year underneath 12 meters of sheet-ice in northern Greenland. So...congratulations...? Kent and a fellow Boy Scout from Denmark had earned the right to act as "Junior scientific aids" at Camp Century, an American military research base constructed with permission of the Danish government under 40 feet of ice. The stated goal of Camp Century to perform various

temperature experiments, analyze ice cores, and test cold-weather construction techniques.

The temperature on the surface was 50 below zero, with 100 mile an hour winds, but below the ice sheet American engineers had constructed 28 buildings featuring televisions, hot showers, a chapel, a library, a hospital, a theater, all connected by tunnels and powered by a PM-2A: The world's first portable nuclear reactor. The scouts were supposed to assist with research projects, so presumably fetching a lot of coffee and trying to stay out of the way. The contest had been a publicity stunt, obviously, the boys would supposedly participate in experiments and learn about life in an icy environment, but the real goal was for fresh-faced young choir boys to deliver a glowing report to the American press regarding their experience under the ice at America's premier research facility. But what the boys wouldn't report, because they didn't know it, was the actual sinister purpose of Camp Century.

In a twist worthy of a James Bond movie, camp century was in fact a front for what was intended to be a massive construction undertaking known as project ice worm, A giant underground complex of tunnels 2500 miles in length, around 52,000 square miles in area. —That's bigger than the state of Alabama, it's bigger than Half of the American states—connecting nuclear silos and housing some 600 iceman missiles, which were customized versions of existing

Minuteman missiles, which had been adapted to function in frigid conditions. Minuteman missile, not a great name for a weapon. Sounds like it go could go off with very little provocation. The Arctic and the extreme north represents the shortest distance between America and the former Soviet union, which explains the location of camp century a.k.a. project ice worm, and the idea was that the missiles would be shifted constantly from silo to silo via a complex maze of tracks and tunnels, so that it would be theoretically impossible for the Soviet union to figure out exactly where to strike at any particular time.

Three years after building camp century, American scientists experienced one of history's most epic facepalms when measurements indicated that the ice sheet, which was presumed to be stable, was actually shifting in a pattern of contraction and expansion that would have been very familiar to any scientist who had ever studied, um, ice. The ice sheets were in fact moving exactly as if they were giant sheets made of ice, and it quickly became clear that their titanic swelling and contracting and shifting motions would destroy the entire complex in less than a decade. Two years later, the ceiling of the reactor room buckled, and threatened to collapse. By 1964 the reactor had been abandoned and the complex was running on diesel power. The entire camp was abandoned by 1966. In another boneheaded miscalculation,

geologists of the time assumed that the shifting ice would entomb the wreckage of camp century for all time, and along with it all of the remaining diesel fuel and nuclear waste; these geologists were not killing it with the assumption game. it turns out there's yet another unfortunate side effect of global warming: as the melting of polar ice sheets accelerates, more and more of Camp century is being exposed to the elements, including all of that radioactive waste and the aforementioned 200,000 liters of diesel fuel which are now threatening to leak into the soil. This potential environmental catastrophe was recently described by researchers at the American geophysical union as a "multinational, multigenerational problem affecting both America and Denmark, which could cause a diplomatic crisis as the two countries dispute who is responsible for the cleanup." Denmark most likely would point out that America was dishonest about the purpose of the base and its intentions. And America would probably point to our National policy of "suck it." The classic American doctrine of We are shady AF and you should've known better. That is America's official motto, I believe. I think it's on the \$100 bill. I see them so rarely, I wouldn't know.

Project Sunshine

If you listened to our nuclear power episode, you'll remember that America created the atom bomb via the Manhattan project. And the

development of nuclear technology was, to say the least, hasty. Rarely has so little forethought gone into such a consequential series of events. During World War II there was tremendous pressure to create a weapon that would neutralize the axis forces and shift the global balance of power for decades to come. When America dropped Fat Man and Little Boy on Hiroshima and Nagasaki—we've mentioned those honest-to-God cutesy nicknames for the bombs, that was genuinely how the government of the United States referred to them. It's so disturbing that we used nicknames for weapons of mass destruction, and also SO not politically correct, I don't think we would name weapons today using derogatory titles ... "At 0900 hours the United States initiated a nuclear strike against Russia using two supersonic intercontinental ballistic missiles known as dumbass and cripple"—so at the time of the Hiroshima bombing, very few if any scientists fully understood what the long-term effects of a nuclear blast would be. They understood the short term effect--boomsplode was the desired result--and they knew that an atom bomb wasn't just an incendiary device, it wasn't the same as dropping a missile. If your city gets hit with a missile you can literally start rebuilding and recovering seconds after the explosion, and that's probably the best time to get started if you want to save some lives and put some legs and fingers on ice or whatever—This is grim stuff—But the radiation fallout

from a nuclear explosion is arguably more damaging and horrific than the initial blast, and it's amazing to me that president Truman went ahead with dropping two bombs despite being fully aware of the fact that no one could conclusively determine the outcome. Manhattan project scientists were literally performing calculations as late as 1945 to determine whether a nuclear explosion could ignite the atmosphere and exterminate all life on earth. From an article summarizing the view of the leader of the Metallurgical Laboratory in Los Alamos, Arthur Compton, "If, after calculation...it were proved that the chances were more than approximately three in one million that the earth would be vaporized by the atomic explosion, he would not proceed with the project. Calculation proved the figures slightly less -- and the project continued."

I mean those are decent odds, and I get it, like if you tell me there's a one in 3 million chance that I'm going to get in a car accident today, I'm still driving to work. But a one in 3 million chance that you're going to ignite the atmosphere? Too high. I guess I'm not a risk taker. I'm like Jim Carrey in dumb and dumber. Tell me the odds that we're going to destroy the earth. 3 million to one? "So you're saying there's a chance."

So in an amazingly counterintuitive and bass ackwards sequence of events, America first *used* their doomsday weapons and then started experimenting to figure out the actual ramifications of using their doomsday

weapons. This became increasingly urgent when the atom bomb was succeeded by the much more powerful hydrogen bomb, and especially when Russia developed their own version in 1953. Now there was the real potential for mutually assured destruction, and it was around this time that it occurred to government scientists that maybe they should figure out just how bad a nuclear holocaust might be. The term "Nuclear holocaust" itself seems like it provides some hints. Holocaust, rarely a positive. You'd have to be a serious glass-half-full weirdo to spin "holocaust" with some kind of silver lining. The first official investigation into the effect of nuclear fallout was codenamed Project Gabriel, which sounds like a major operation but was actually the 1950s version of a guy doing his own research. The atomic energy commission had asked nuclear physicist Nicholas M Smith, of the Oak Ridge national laboratory, to produce a report detailing the effects of nuclear radiation on the human body, and in particular strontium-90, the radioactive isotope that is considered to be among the most dangerous elements of nuclear fallout. I love how they referred to this operation by an ominous name and dubbed it a government project; it was a one dude in a laboratory basement somewhere. Like even in high school or college if they assign you a *project*, they let you work in groups, this was less of a project and more of an essay. "I want 300 words on nuclear

holocaust by Friday, Nick. Make sure it's in one of those little plastic binders." They basically assigned this guy a thesis. The most depressing thesis ever.

Smith produced his report in 1949, concluding that strontium 90 is a "bone seeker," which means it is associated with calcium and settles in bone and bone marrow. Two years later the project was revived but this time with a team of scientists instead of just Nick, seems like a positive adjustment, they were like "thank you for your service, Nick, but maybe we should leave it up to more than one dude to decide whether blowing up the world is a bad thing." and the operation was rechristened project HORN. At this time the atomic energy commission was trying to convince the public that even though strontium 90 itself was hazardous, nuclear fallout from mushroom clouds would be harmless outside of the direct impact areas, because the concentrations of radioactive isotopes were diluted and dispersed throughout the atmosphere.

There were a few skeptics who weren't exactly buying what the AEC was selling, and questions raised by project Gabriel and project horn eventually led to the creation of a brand new project with one of the most cringeworthy names I can imagine. Project sunshine was initiated in 1953 with the goal of conclusively determining the effects of radiation on biological tissue and in particular the flesh and bones of developing

humans, aka babies. Project Sunshine. Examining irradiated babies. Wow. So of course the scientists had a conundrum, how do you find test subjects? they presumably took a vote and decided that there might be some backlash if they used live baby-bodies for this trial, that would be mildly controversial and Logistically challenging. Excuse me, can I borrow your baby? We'll give him back, we promise. He may be a little bit lumpy. Apologies in advance for any growths. If it makes you feel any better, he will be serving his country admirably. Your cancer-riddled baby is a true patriot. WAS a true patriot." No, that would be inhumane. Perhaps the most notorious quote from project sunshine was from Dr. Willard Libby, "...human samples are of prime importance and if anybody knows how to do a good job of body snatching, they will really be serving their country." That's amazing. I love my country, but I don't have dead-baby-body snatching love for my country. "You SAY you're a patriot, Jim, but I haven't seen you rob a single baby grave." We all have a line, for me it's robbing the graves of infants.

So this is absolutely true, The United States government initiated a program that consisted of literally stealing body parts from dead babies. The atomic energy commission coordinated with European nations to arrange to have over 1500 infant cadavers and/or various parts of dead babies shipped to the United States to be irradiated

and tested. Many of these were harvested from children whose parents were completely unaware that their babies were being dissected and their body parts added to the accumulation of limbs and organs that were being Amazon primed to America for irradiating.

One British mother whose deceased infant's legs were shipped to the United States was quoted as saying, "I asked if I could put her christening robe on her [For the funeral], but I wasn't allowed to, and that upset me terribly because she wasn't christened," she said. "No one asked me about doing things like that, taking bits and pieces from her."

In a cruel twist, only some 500 of the 1500 samples were actually tested. 1000 baby bodies were desecrated for no reason at all. And it's weird, because if you think of this project dispassionately from a scientific standpoint, obviously this was just inert tissue. But there had to be a better way. There has to be informed consent. And I feel like they could have gotten it. I feel like if you framed this as a patriotic duty to participate in experiments that would save American lives, you would have had a few volunteers. There are at least 500 crazies out there who would donate their children to the government. You could probably get *live* children if you wanted. Most people love their kids but there are a few real brats out there. So there were other ways. But

instead the government went about this in the shadiest, most super villain way imaginable.

By the way there is now a nonprofit organization that uses the name project sunshine. You can find them at Projectsunshine.org. Their stated mission is to lift the spirits of children in hospitals, I swear to God, it started with sending clowns into medical facilities, and obviously now with Covid they've switched over to various remote meeting options. They also send like entertainment kits or something to the kids, it's a little bit vague, but hey, I'm not hating on the mission of this charitable organization. I'm just hating on their Name choice and I'd be very concerned about how that reflects on their competency as an organization working with vulnerable children. If you Google the words project sunshine, this organization will pop up halfway down the page, under a bunch of horrifying descriptions of mutilated baby carcasses being shipped to the United States for radiation testing. Did not one of these literal clowns google the words "project sunshine" before they registered the freaking trademark? Clowns, man. What are you gonna do.

Project Thor

I learned a new word this week. It's not technically a real word, but it's a word that has been used to describe this next declassified military project. "Ortillery," A mashup of orbital and

artillery. A not-real word that describes a not-real weapon, but one that almost became a reality and still *could* at some point in the science fiction future.

Imagine a projectile the size and shape of a telephone pole made from pure tungsten, a metal that is second in hardness only to diamond.

What I'm describing was the brainchild of scientist, Army veteran, and eventually science fiction author Jerry Pournelle, who conceived the project while working at Boeing in the 1950s.

The projectiles would be launched from orbital satellites and their journey to the target would take around ten minutes on average. That's most likely going to be a shorter timeframe than the journey of an ICBM missile which has to travel across continents and battle wind resistance for the entire trip. These massive tungsten rods would slip frictionlessly from orbit and then sizzle their way through the atmosphere; obviously the wind resistance would slow them considerably but they would still impact the earth at around Mach 10, striking with the force of a small tactical nuclear bomb, yet without any of the radioactive fallout. There would be no explosive warhead attached, no detonation device of any kind; the destructive power would be purely a result of gravity and the speed of impact, this is technically known as kinetic bombardment, and it would be like getting pounded by a savage hailstorm of targeted meteors.

Pournelle referred to his kinetic

weapon as project Thor, for obvious reasons. It would be similar to a storm of lightning from the heavens. Another nickname for the project was "rods from God" which sounds a little more pervy. But if you got hit with these things you'd be divinely fucked, so I guess that makes sense. Rods from God; Holy fuck indeed. Pournelle's concept was entirely theoretical and Boeing never moved forward with the design, but there was a precedent for real-world use of kinetic bombardment: so called lazy dog bombs, which were really just short, fat, torpedo-shaped bullets a couple inches long, were dropped from aircraft during the Korean and Vietnam wars. All of their destructive impact came from reaching terminal velocity; by the time they hit the ground it was as if they had been fired from the barrel of a gun. A similar concept to Project Thor became part of Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative, AKA the notorious, frequently-mocked and ultimately doomed "Star Wars" missile defense program. In this new version the rods would actually be small, powered projectiles referred to as "brilliant pebbles." Sounds like a sugary breakfast cereal. Also an embarrassing way to die. Killed by pebbles, I don't care how brilliant they are, you can keep your exceptional pebbles and kill me with something dignified like a hatchet.

Operation Northwoods

I was somewhat reluctant to include

this one, because it's so extreme and it feeds the flame of conspiracy theories. But I think it is important to understand that even though conspiracy theories are often dangerous and you should always react with immediate skepticism, as we've mentioned in the past, the government is shady AF. The idea that 9/11 was a false flag operation has been thoroughly debunked, and we talked about it before, but that doesn't mean that covert government agencies haven't at various times in history been capable of or willing to sacrifice American lives in the name of deceiving the public. Operation Northwoods was flat out sinister. It was Loose Change, but for Cuba. The CIA presented a plan to John F. Kennedy that proposed hijacking planes or staging hijackings, blowing up American ships, and committing violent terrorism in United States cities and blaming it all on Fidel Castro to provide justification for attacking Cuba. You can learn more about the shady stuff that Kennedy DID agree to in our Bay of Pigs episode, but thankfully there was a line he wouldn't cross. However the operation was authorized by the joint chiefs of staff before being ultimately rejected by John F. Kennedy, so it's not like this was the result of some crazy "anything goes, out of the box" brainstorming session. This was a genuine attempt by high ranking government officials to convince the president United States to agree to kill and terrorize American citizens in service of a

political goal. Operation Northwoods first appears in a document called "justification for US military intervention in Cuba" generated by the joint chiefs of staff along with the department of defense in 1962. I like that they didn't bother with an arcane secret name, they were like we call this is the "blame it on Cuba" project.

We talked about other rejected operations that were intended to be targeted against Fidel Castro, like operation mongoose, which consisted of a bunch of harebrained schemes to try to assassinate the Cuban dictator, but I don't think we mentioned operation dirty trick, another extremely apt and inexplicably honest name for a military operation. The proposed secret program took advantage of the fact that The United States was about to launch project mercury, the first American spaceflight program to send an astronaut into orbit. So, this is diabolical. The idea was that when the launch failed, and the rocket blew up or crashed back to earth or just spun forever through the infinity of space, the United States would—say it with me—find a way to blame Fidel Castro. It was the ultimate Cover your ass operation. CYA instead of CIA. Shows how much faith they had in their own space program. Luckily the launch was successful. John Glenn became the first American to orbit the earth in February of 1962, no doubt frustrating many government officials who were itching to scapegoat Fidel Castro.

"Dammit John Glenn, your lack of sploding is super inconvenient. A true patriot would have combusted. At least steal some baby bodies, to make it up to your country."

Operation paperclip

When it comes to misnomers, sunshine was a doozy, but I don't think there's ever been a more benign and bizarre name for an undeniably evil scheme than 1946's operation paperclip. paperclip evolved from operation overcast, which itself was an offshoot of a government program called The Enemy Personnel Exploitation Section. That's disarmingly honest, and Those names could not be more opposite. I see why they switched to paperclip. "I'm just throwing this out here guys, but I think we might want to rename operation "hide our war crimes"...how about operation fuzzy slippers? What's the most innocuous thing you can think of? Operation featureless gray wall. Operation nothing to see here. The goal of this operation, which WAS successfully implemented, was to recruit high-level Nazi scientists to work for the American Government after the end of WWII. President Truman officially approved the program in April 1946, and there was a rationale for the name: American Ordnance Corps officers would place paperclips on specific personnel folders to indicate which scientists the government wanted to keep. Most of the Nazi scientists came from

the Osenburg list. That list had been a desperation move by Germany. When the war had taken a turn for the worse after the disastrous attempted invasion of Russia, the Germans began pulling from combat all of the scientists and intellectuals who they decided might be more valuable if used for their intellects rather than for their fighting ability. That tracks. A trait I don't typically associate with scientists: kicking a lot of ass. The list of names was vetted for loyalty and reliability. So it would be hard to argue that these scientists were all reluctant Nazis, they had been given the thumbs up by the third Reich, and some of them were leaders of the Nazi party and undeniably loyal to Germany during the war. At the tail end of WWII the Osenburg list had been discovered by a Polish technician who found pieces of it stuffed in a toilet at Bonn University in Poland. That is admirable job dedication. That guy was very meticulous and inquisitive. I probably would've let that one go. Wadded up paper in the toilet, literal toilet paper. This guy was like, "I'm going to dig out this toilet pulp and blow on it until it dries and then smooth it out and read it because I clearly don't have hobbies." The list made its way to MI6, and from there to America. Now, originally the idea was just to interview the scientists. That was the stated goal of operation overcast. Probably a *vigorous* interview. Enhanced interrogation, as they like to say. But when it became clear that many of the scientists were extremely

knowledgeable and had worked on rocket technology, the strategy shifted. More than 1600 Operation paperclip scientists would eventually be imported like German beer and distributed throughout the country to various military and research locations. Many of the former Nazis would eventually contribute to valuable patents and win scientific awards, the most famous undoubtedly being Warner von Braun, who designed the Saturn V launch vehicle, without which American never would have made it to the moon. So thanks, Nazis! Totally worth it. All is forgiven. Jesus. Operation Paperclip scientists Kurt Debus and Warner Von Braun even have lunar craters named after them. None of the scientists would ever end up facing consequences for their potential war crimes, one was charged and acquitted while another, Walter Schreiber, who was alleged to have participated in human experimentation at a German concentration camp, would be spirited away to Argentina by the American military. So that's Cool.

We love to end on a high note. If there are one or two that we didn't cover, and you're yelling at your audio device right now, just keep in mind we've done a lot of episodes, we covered Area 51 and MK ultra etc. in other episodes so these were the most interesting ones to me that we hadn't already discussed.

Our review this week comes from

Apple podcasts,

The Most Hilarious Podcast

★★★★★

This is the perfect podcast if you're in a bad mood. The way Shane and Duncan can riff off of each other is priceless. The topic doesn't even need to be funny and they are able to come up with funny concepts on the spot. The best part is you actually learn a lot about things you wouldn't have even thought to study. Do yourself a favor and check this podcast out, you won't regret it!

L. Wildey via Apple Podcasts · United States of America · 02/21/2022

 Help

<https://abcnews.go.com/amp/International/story?id=80970&page=1>

<https://www.insidescience.org/manhattan-project-legacy/atmosphere-on-fire>

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_SUNSHINE

<https://www.history.com/.amp/news/project-iceworm-cold-war-nuclear-weapons-greenland>

<http://www.seniorsscoutinghistory.org/archive/Scouting/Scouting-60Nov.pdf>

<https://amp.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/27/receding-icecap-top-secret-us-nuclear-project-greenland->

[camp-century-project-iceworm](#)

<https://news.agu.org/press-release/melting-ice-sheet-could-release-frozen-cold-war-era-waste/>

<https://agupubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/2016GL069688>