



NRO REVIEW COMPLETED

SECRETSAPC-24928 ✓
Copy 9 of 10

11 March 1958

MEMORANDUM FOR: OSI

SUBJECT : Dissemination of Information on AQUATONE

1. I understand you had planned to have a meeting with certain personnel from AFCIN-Z on 19 February which was later postponed until 19 March. I am advised that out of a partial list of six individuals who are going to attend the meeting only two were AQUATONE cleared. I am also advised that the discussion would have covered such matters as the performance of the U-2 aircraft, history of recent operations, and the like.

2. Either I have been misinformed about this meeting or, as seems more likely, there has been some misunderstanding between us about the dissemination of information on AQUATONE. In order to remove any misunderstanding, I would like to explain that the rule binding on all individuals connected with this Project is that knowledge of operational matters may be disseminated only to persons with an AQUATONE clearance (as distinguished from a TALENT clearance) and that AQUATONE clearances may be extended to additional individuals only after coordination with the AQUATONE Security Officer.

3. I am confident that, if there is any misunderstanding, it has to do with the distinction between AQUATONE and TALENT clearances, and I assure you that many persons in addition to yourself have been confused about this distinction. The basic distinction is between AQUATONE which is a clandestine intelligence collection project, on the one hand, and, on the other, the raw intelligence of various types which is produced by AQUATONE (and by certain other similar collection activities). The original intent was that an AQUATONE clearance would be issued to individuals having a need to know about the collection project and a TALENT clearance to individuals requiring access to the raw intelligence produced by AQUATONE but not having a need to know about collection techniques or

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operations. It was the hope that personnel holding only a TALENT clearance although they would inevitably be aware that photography [redacted] in the TALENT system had been obtained through illegal overflights would require only the most limited and nonsensitive knowledge of AQUATONE's technical capability and would not have to have any knowledge of organization, locations of bases, specific operations carried out (including mission tracks), cover, or future plans for this collection project.

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4. Through no fault of those administering the TALENT and AQUATONE systems, I feel that we have fallen into several erroneous practices and that the above distinction has become seriously blurred. Speaking with the advantage of hindsight, one mistake that I believe we have made has been to grant only TALENT clearances to a number of analysts, including [redacted] photo interpreters, who could not perform their functions without having or acquiring a knowledge of AQUATONE capabilities, mission tracks, mission dates, and other operational information. Thus at a very early stage it came to appear that the TALENT clearance covered such information, at least for some individuals. Inevitably this blurred the distinction between the two clearances. A second mistake, as it now seems to me, was our failure to sterilize AQUATONE-produced intelligence sufficiently to deny operational information to the user thereof. For instance, photography is indexed by mission numbers and mission plots and made available (I understand) to the users of TALENT photography. Automatically, then, every TALENT-cleared analyst knows almost everything there is to know about the history of AQUATONE operations. Partly, I believe, as a result of these circumstances, it is I am convinced a fact that the AQUATONE/TALENT distinction has been obscure or nonexistent in the minds of many TALENT-cleared persons. We have, alas, reports from several places in the intelligence community to the effect that TALENT briefings regularly include a description of the collection activity.

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5. I mention these circumstances so you should realize that I am aware of what has happened. Nevertheless, I cannot agree that even at this late date our effort to establish and give real meaning to the distinction between TALENT and AQUATONE can be abandoned. Even though this particular horse may already have escaped from the stable, we may desire to keep other animals there in the future. We are, therefore, endeavoring to close the door. More specifically, I have asked Mr. James Reber and others to try to make the AQUATONE/TALENT distinction clear conceptually and then to achieve administratively a change in the character

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of the TALENT briefing. Concurrently with this effort, a number of individuals who now hold only TALENT clearance will be given full AQUATONE clearance and made aware of their possession of information going beyond the TALENT system.

6. The above recital will perhaps explain my request in paragraph 2 above that information on AQUATONE capabilities and operations be limited to individuals with AQUATONE clearances approved by the AQUATONE Security Officer. Despite the grossly excessive spread of knowledge about this Project that has already occurred, I would like to have your help in preventing any further degradation of our security.

(sgt) Richard M. Bissell, Jr.

RICHARD M. BISSELL, JR.
Project Director

RMB [] (5 Mar 58)

Rewritten: RMB [] (8 Mar 58)

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