

A President Visits Martin Marietta

Author: Bill Cossaboom

My thanks to Mr. Gene Horak for sharing his records and recollections, without which, this article could not have been written with the fidelity it required.

Also to Mr. David Welch, Senior Trade Show Coordinator, Lockheed Martin Space Systems Company and Kenneth L. Johnson, General Counsel, Intellectual Property, Lockheed Martin Space Systems Company.

On November 24, 1987, President Ronald Reagan spoke before an assembly of three thousand enthusiastic people at Martin Marietta's Waterton Plant. From landing to take off of Marine One, the entire visit lasted about two hours. The President's remarks lasted about nineteen minutes.



The President Speaking

Background

The United States was in the midst of terminating the 'cold war' and President Reagan wanted to send a message from a known defense contractor facility (with a visual back drop) to Russian General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev that the United States meant business: Gorbachev could negotiate in good faith or face the consequences of a fully operational Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) (commonly known as "Star Wars" as referred to by the press).

SDI was a research program investigating ways that the United States and its allies could defend themselves against a ballistic missile attack. It involved a number of different weapon concepts, both space-based and ground-based; an overall architectural effort with simulation and test capability; command, control and communications and battle management; surveillance programs; and new innovative technology concepts.

The President knew he wanted to send the message, the question was not how, but where, this message could be communicated. Two possible locations were selected, Martin Marietta Astronautics Group (MMAG) Denver, and another defense contractor located in St. Louis.

In reviewing MMAG, an after-hours tour / inspection was undertaken by a White House representative. The activity included the Factory (both floors), Medical, Cafeteria, Firehouse, the

R2P2 facility, and other pertinent locations on the grounds. The White House decided on MMAG and only two people in the company knew of a pending Presidential visit at this time.

The President was to take a tour of the R2P2 facility and have a classified briefing prior to activities in the Factory. R2P2 was the acronym for Rapid Retargeting/Precision Pointing Simulator. The facility conducted national research for SDI.

SDIs' future capability was embodied by Zenith Star. The Zenith Star experiment was designed to test the feasibility of putting a defensive laser weapon on an orbiting satellite. The model prepared for the President's visit was eighty feet long - built on the factory floor in 6 ½ days as the model was needed 'faster than posthaste'. The President was to speak in front of this model that was laid on its side to provide the backdrop the President wanted. The model was wrapped in aluminum and gold foil to present a space-like appearance.



Zenith Star backdrop with President Reagan speaking

Advance Preparations

That Tuesday, the 24th of November, was an unforgettable day for MMAG and all who attended. The visit was so organized; so smooth, and so seamless that it appeared to be effortless. But effortless it was not.

In his book, *Raise Heaven and Earth*, William B. Harwood devotes a section of Part VIII: *Crisis and Opportunity*, 1982-1989 to the Reagan visit. The section provides in detail the results of a can-do organization- and what MMAG had to accomplish. After the initial tour of the facility; Harwood states:

"What they needed they were told, was a space big enough to hold about three thousand employees, up to one thousand invited community leaders, scores of reporters, television commentators and TV camera crews, plus telephone and other communications facilities, off space, and much more. "Yes we can," "Sure we can do that," and "No problem" were Horak's stock responses to anything the White House man said was needed."

On Nov. 11, MMAG was requested to provide the advance team with secretarial support at their hotel, a room at the plant with telephone access, a city map, a 2nd floor factory layout, a team roster of key personnel, layout/photos of the entire facility with emphasis on the 2nd floor factory, hotel recommendations, a list of car dealers for motorcade vehicles and buses for Press Corps use.

On Nov. 13; Arrangements were agreed upon whereby MMAG would provide an on-site Press Filing room (classroom style for about 150 people), four edit rooms for the major networks, and IBM typewriters.

MMAG was asked not to contact the local Secret Service field office at that time, and to rent a bus for the Advance Team; other White House needs at the Plant were identified, as well as other preliminary items.

By November 16, MMAG was positioned for the Advance Team meeting the next day. Major interfaces on the Advance Team were Jim Hooley (Advance Team Lead), Bob Schmidt (Staff Assistant to the President), Jim Lake, (Site Man), and Tom Pernice (Staff Assistant to the President). The meeting with the Advance Team included twelve White House personnel, nine Secret Service, three military, and thirteen MMAG representatives.

Visits by the White House Pre-Advance Team began on November 18. Telecons had happened well in advance of that date. The Teams were reviewing the progress of the preparation and positioning of major hardware, including the special lighting, and sound system. Another function of the Advance Team was setting up the speechwriter's stations, where the TV cameras would be located, along with the National News Media.

On the final day of preparation a walkthrough of the President's Visit was performed. The President's schedule was as follows:

“10:30 Air Force One lands Stapleton Airport.

10:35 Marine One departs Stapleton Airport.

10:50 Marine One Lands at Waterton Martin Marietta Plant.

10:55 am President departs landing site and goes to the R2P2 facility arrives at 11:00 am.

11:40 am President departs R2P2 facility arrives at factory (spent 45 minutes at R2P2 instead of the scheduled 40 minutes).

11:45 am President proceeds to the holding room (factory).

11:50 am President proceeds on-stage and takes his seat.

Dr. Graham makes opening remarks. Short Briefings are given by Gen. Schriever, Dr. Seitz, Dr. Buchsbaum.

12:13 pm Mr. Pownall introduces the President to the audience.

12:15 pm President proceeds to the podium and makes his presentation and remarks to end at 12:30 pm.

12:36 pm Presentation on behalf of MMAG made by Gene Horak.

12:43 pm President departs the stage and proceeds to holding room.

12:50 pm President departs the holding to Marine One landing site for boarding”

Dr.'s Graham, Seitz, and Buchsbaum were part of the panel on the stage with President Reagan. All served as Science Advisors to the president. Their particular area of expertise was physics. General Schriever was the commander of Air Force Systems Command and an architect of the Air Force's ballistic missile and military space program.



The Podium

Preparations were moving fast! MMAG had just thirteen days to accomplish everything for the visit. Thirteen days! This included turning a factory into an auditorium, (in 8 days), preparing an anteroom for the President (yes, there was a big bowl of jellybeans), all necessary press accommodations and a slew of other site preparatory items, including the internal MMAG items.

From Harwood: "Then the Secret Service discovered the huge model of Zenith Star was hollow, so nothing would do until a door had been cut in the back of it so agents could do a security check."

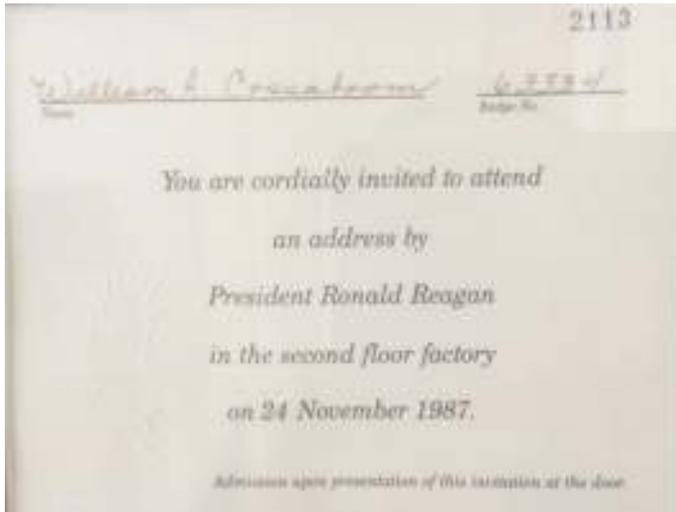
The Secret Service then wanted the removal of telephone poles deemed too close to the landing site of Marine One. I quote here from an article in the Rocky Mountain News, Sunday, November 29, 1987:

"The telephone poles had to go. They poked up out of the parking lot at Martin Marietta Corp.'s giant plant in Jefferson County and under normal circumstances posed no problem. But these weren't normal circumstances, because the telephone poles occupied the same space where a Marine chopper pilot planned to land a helicopter and its passenger, the president of the United States....AND THE telephone poles were plucked from the parking lot to make room for the helicopter." The newspaper went on to marvel at the quick response MMAG was capable of accomplishing.

The day of the visit was busy and the atmosphere was electric. The Secret Service began the sweep of the Factory and Facility at 3:30 a.m., with use of Secret Service Special agents along with dogs, and ATF agents to clear the area for the President's visit.

Invited employees had received their invitations and were transported to the Engineering Building. Those of us who worked in the factory reported to SSB that morning for bussing back to the Factory. Attendees were admitted via the east stairs leading up from the Engineering Building and each employee had to go through metal detector search for entry. Attendees were allowed to retain their invitations as a memento of this occasion. The other memento given to

employees of MMAG was inspiration; as President Reagan recognized them for the work they did and the sacrifices they made in the name of national security.



An Invitation to attend the speech of President Reagan

The President was scheduled to speak for fifteen minutes per the schedule established by the Advance Team. The President spoke for nineteen minutes. During his remarks, the President made it clear that he would not bow to the Soviet Union or any other country- that the United States of America would remain a beacon for freedom.

The President had a habit of carrying a sheet of paper that he had annotated his thoughts on. He often referred to his notes while giving remarks already prepared and approved by the White House. The White House press office had a typist (typing frantically) behind the scenes during the presentation capturing the remarks as given.

The Presidents' Remarks

"Just in my lifetime, we have gone from a time when many, if not most, people traveled by horse power-and I mean the kind that eats hay- to an era of supersonic passenger service."

"You are laboring to develop a defensive system that will change history. Once you've completed your work, the world will never be the same. I suggest it will be a better and a safer world. And what better legacy can this generation leave than a safer world?"

"The America I was born into was acclaimed for its liberty and opportunity, yet that opportunity for which we were so proud has been expanded today beyond anything the Americans of my youth could possibly have imagined."

"Because the question is not will strategic defenses be develop? The questions is rather, will the Soviet Union be the only country to possess them? The choice is ours."

"Well, in the decades ahead, who knows what governments will obtain ballistic missile technology? Who knows how rational or competent those governments will be."

"Until now, mankind's search for security often focused on expanding the ability to last out, to kill, to destroy. Technological advances throughout the ages increased man's destructive

power...But humanity, in almost every case found a defense for every offense, and that is exactly what we are seeking.....”

The President (missing his queue) sat down prior to receiving a presentation on behalf of MMAG. He quickly got back up, and the presentation, given by Gene Horak, went smoothly- an example of a quick response by both the President and MMAG!

The MMAG response to the quick turnaround required by the Reagan visit (as typical of all customer requests) was impressive to the White House. According to Harwood, “Less than a year later, when the White House sought a place for Vice President George Bush (also presidential candidate) to make a major policy speech in the Rocky Mountain Region, Martin Marietta’s Denver astronautics plant immediately came to mind.”

In part because of the remarks made this day, General Secretary Gorbachev retreated. The forty-four year ‘Cold War’ ended in 1991. President Reagan received two standing ovations during his remarks. The President also received a standing ovation from history.