The Pentagon’s War on Accountability

BY WILLIAM D. HARTUNG

ow you see it, now you don’t. Think of it as the Department of Defense’s version of the street con game, three-card monte, or maybe simply as the Pentagon shuffle. In any case, the Pentagon’s budget is as close to a work of art as you’re likely to find in the U.S. government—if by work of art you mean scam.

The United States is on track to spend more than $600 billion on the military this year—more than was spent at the height of President Ronald Reagan’s Cold War military buildup, and more than the military budgets of at least the next seven nations in the world combined. And keep in mind that that’s just a partial total. As an analysis by the Straus Military Reform Project has shown, if we count related activities like homeland security, veterans’ affairs, nuclear warhead production at the Department of Energy, military aid to other countries, and interest on the military-related national debt, that figure reaches a cool $1 trillion.

The more that’s spent on “defense,” however, the less the Pentagon wants us to know about how those mountains of money are actually being used. As the only major federal agency that can’t pass an audit, the Department of Defense (DoD) is the poster child for irresponsible budgeting.

It’s not just that its books don’t add up. The DoD is taking active measures to disguise how it is spending the hundreds of billions of taxpayer dollars it receives every year—from using the separate “war budget” as a slush fund to pay for pet projects that have nothing to do with fighting wars to keeping the cost of its new nuclear bomber a secret. Add in dozens of other secret projects hidden in the Department’s budget and the
Pentagon’s poorly documented military aid programs, and it’s clear that the DoD believes it has something to hide.

Don’t for a moment imagine that the Pentagon’s growing list of secret programs and evasive budgetary maneuvers is accidental or simply a matter of sloppy bookkeeping. Much of it is remarkably purposeful. By keeping us in the dark about how it spends our money, the Pentagon has made it virtually impossible for anyone to hold it accountable for just about anything. An entrenched bureaucracy is determined not to provide information that might be used to bring its sprawling budget—and so the institution itself—under control. That’s why budgetary deception has become such a standard operating procedure at the DoD.

The audit problem is a case in point. The Pentagon, along with all other major federal agencies, was first required to make its books auditable in the Chief Financial Officers Act of 1990. More than 25 years later, there is no evidence to suggest that the Pentagon will ever be able to pass an audit. In fact, the one limited instance in which success seemed to be within reach—an audit of a portion of the books of a single service, the Marine Corps—turned out, upon closer inspection, to be a case study in bureaucratic resistance.

In April 2014, when it appeared that the Corps had come back with a clean audit, Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel was so elated that he held a special ceremony in the “Hall of Heroes” at the Pentagon. “It might seem a bit unusual to be in the Hall of Heroes to honor a bookkeeping accomplishment,” he acknowledged, “but damn, this is an accomplishment.”

In March 2015, however, that “accomplishment” vanished into thin air. The Pentagon’s Office of Inspector General (OIG), which had overseen the work of Grant Thornton, the private firm that conducted the audit, denied it had been successful (allegedly in response to “new information”). In fact, in late 2013, as Reuters reported, auditors at the OIG had argued for months against green-lighting Grant Thornton’s work, believing it was full of obvious holes. They were, however, overruled by the Deputy Inspector General for Auditing, who had what Reuters described as a “longstanding professional relationship” with the Grant Thornton executive supervising the audit.

The Pentagon and the firm deny that there was any conflict of interest, but the bottom line is clear enough: there was far more interest in promoting the idea that the Marine Corps could pass an audit than in seeing it actually do so, even if inconvenient facts had to be swept under the rug. This sort of behavior is hardly surprising once you consider all the benefits from an undisturbed status quo that accrue to Pentagon bureaucrats and cash-hungry contractors.

Without a reliable paper trail,
there is no systematic way to track waste, fraud, and abuse in Pentagon contracting, or even to figure out how many contractors the Pentagon employs, though a conservative estimate puts the number at over 641,000.\(^7\) The result is easy money with minimal accountability.

How to Arm the Planet

In recent years, keeping tabs on how the Pentagon spends its money has grown even more difficult thanks to the “war budget”—known in Pentagonese as the Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) account—which has become a nearly bottomless pit for items that have nothing to do with fighting wars. The use of the OCO as a slush fund began in earnest in the early years of the Bush Administration’s war in Iraq and has continued ever since. It’s hard to put a precise number on how much money has been slipped into that budget or taken out of it to pay for pet projects of every sort in the last decade-plus, but the total is certainly more than $100 billion and counting.\(^8\)

The Pentagon’s routine use of the war budget as a way to fund whatever it wants has set an example for a Congress that’s seldom seen a military project it wasn’t eager to pay for. For instance, House Armed Services Committee Chairman Mac Thornberry (R-TX) recently proposed using $18 billion from the war budget to cover items like an extra 11 F-35 combat aircraft and 14 F-18 fighter-bombers the Pentagon hadn’t asked for.\(^9\)

This was great news for Lockheed Martin, which needs a shot in the arm for its troubled F-35 program, already slated to be the most expensive weapons system in history, and for Boeing, which has been lobbying aggressively to keep its F-18 production line open in the face of declining orders from the Navy.\(^10\) But it’s bad news for the troops because, as the Project On Government Oversight has demonstrated, the money used to pay for the unneeded planes will come at the expense of training and maintenance funds.\(^11\)

This is, by the way, the height of hypocrisy at a time when the House Armed Services Committee is routinely sending out hysterical missives about the country’s supposed lack of military readiness.\(^12\) The money to adequately train military personnel and keep their equipment running is, in fact, there. Members of Congress like Thornberry would just have to stop raiding the operations budget to pay for big-ticket weapons systems while turning a blind eye to wasteful spending in other parts of the Pentagon budget.

Thornberry’s gambit may not carry the day, since both President Obama and Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman John McCain oppose it.\(^13\) But as long as a separate war budget exists, the temptation to stuff it with unnecessary programs will persist as well.

Of course, that war budget is just part of the problem. The Pentagon has so many budding programs tucked away in so many different lines of its budget that even its officials have a hard time keeping track of what’s actually going on. As for the rest of us, we’re essentially in the dark.

Consider, for instance, the proliferation of military aid programs. The Security Assistance Monitor, a nonprofit that tracks such programs, has identified more than two dozen of them worth about $10 billion annually.\(^14\) Combine them with similar programs tucked away in the State Department’s budget, and the United States is contributing to the arming and training of security forces in 180 countries.\(^15\) (To put that mind-boggling total in perspective, there are at most 196 countries on the planet.) Who could possibly keep track of such programs, much less what effect they may be having on the countries and militaries involved, or on the complex politics of, and conflicts in, various regions?

Best suggestion: don’t even think about it (which is exactly what the Pentagon and the military-industrial complex want). And no need for Congress to do so either. After all, as Lora Lumpe and Jeremy Ravinsky of the Open Society Foundations noted earlier this year, the Pentagon is the only government agency providing foreign assistance that does not have to submit to Congress an annual budget justification for what it does.\(^16\) As a result, they write, “the public does not know how much the DoD is spending in a given country and why.”

Slush Funds Galore

If smokescreens and evasive maneuvers aren’t enough to hide the Pentagon’s actual priorities from the taxpaying public, there’s always secrecy. The Secrecy Project at the Federation of American Scientists recently put the size of the intelligence portion of the national security state’s “black budget”—its secret spending
on everything from spying to developing high-tech weaponry—at more than $70 billion. That figure includes a wide variety of activities carried out through the CIA, NSA, and other members of the intelligence community, but $16.8 billion of it was requested directly by the Department of Defense. And the $70 billion is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to secret spending programs, since billions more in secret financing for the development and acquisition of new weapons systems has been squirreled away elsewhere.

The largest recent project to have its total costs shrouded in secrecy is the B-21, the Air Force’s new nuclear bomber. Air Force officials claim that they need to keep the cost secret lest potential enemies “connect the dots” and learn too much about the plane’s key characteristics. In a letter to Senator McCain, an advocate of making the cost of the plane public, Randall Walden of the Air Force’s Rapid Capabilities Office claimed that there was “a strong correlation between the cost of an air vehicle and its total weight.” This, he suggested, might make it “decisively easier” for potential opponents to guess its range and payload.

If such assessments sound ludicrous, it’s because they are. As the histories of other major Pentagon acquisition programs have shown, the price of a system tells you just that—its price—and nothing more. Otherwise, with its classic cost overruns, the F-35 would have a range beyond compare, possibly to Mars and back. Of course, the real rationale for keeping the full cost estimate for the B-21 secret is to avoid bad publicity. Budget analyst Todd Harrison of the Center for Strategic and International Studies suggests that it’s an attempt to avoid “sticker shock” for a program that he estimates could cost more than $100 billion to develop and purchase.

The bomber, in turn, is just part of a planned $1 trillion splurge over the next three decades on a new generation of bombers, ballistic missile submarines, and ground-based nuclear missiles, part of an updating of the vast U.S. nuclear arsenal. And keep this in mind: that trillion dollars is simply an initial estimate before the usual Pentagon cost overruns even begin to come into play. Financially, the nuclear plan is going to hit taxpayer wallets particularly hard in the mid-2020s when a number of wildly expensive non-nuclear systems like the F-35 combat aircraft will also be hitting peak production.

Under the circumstances, it doesn’t take a genius to figure out that there’s only one way to avoid the budgetary equivalent of a 30-car pile-up: increase the Pentagon’s already ample funding yet again. Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Brian McKeon was referring to the costs of building new nuclear delivery vehicles when he said that the Administration was “wondering how the heck we’re going to pay for it, and probably thanking our lucky stars we won’t be here to answer the question.” Of course, the rest of us will be stuck holding the bag when all those programs cloaked in secrecy suddenly come out of hiding and the bills come fully due.

At this point, you may not be shocked to learn that, in response to McKeon’s uncomfortable statement, the Pentagon has come up with yet another budgetary gimmick. It’s known as the “National Sea-Based Deterrence Fund,” or as Taxpayers for Common Sense more accurately labels it, “the Navy’s submarine slush fund.” The idea—a longstanding darling of the submarine lobby (and yes, Virginia, there is a submarine lobby in Washington)—is to set up a separate slush fund outside the Navy’s normal shipbuilding bud-
get. That’s where the money for the new ballistic missile submarine program, currently slated to cost $139 billion for 12 subs, would go.

Establishing such a new slush fund would, in turn, finesse any direct budgetary competition between the submarine program and the new surface ships the Navy also wants, and so avoid a political battle that might end up substantially reducing the number of vessels the Navy is hoping to buy over the next 30 years. Naturally, the money for the submarine fund will have to come from somewhere, either one of the other military services or that operations and maintenance budget so regularly raided to help pay for expensive weapons programs.

Not to be outmaneuvered, Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James has now asked Congress to set up a “strategic deterrence fund” to pay for its two newest nuclear delivery vehicles, the planned bomber and a long-range nuclear-armed ballistic missile. In theory, this would take pressure off other major Air Force projects like the F-35, but as with the submarine fund, it adds up if a future president and a future Congress can be persuaded to jack up the Pentagon budget to make room for these and other weapons systems.

In the end, however the specifics work out, any “fund” for such weaponry will be just another case of smoke and mirrors, a way of kicking the funding crisis down the road in hopes of fatter budgets to come. Why make choices now when the Pentagon and the military services can bet on blackmailing a future Administration and a future Congress into ponying up the extra billions of dollars needed to make their latest ill-conceived plans add up?

If your head is spinning after this brief tour of the Pentagon’s budget labyrinth, it should be. That’s just what the Pentagon wants: to leave Congress, any Administration, and the public too confused and exhausted to actually hold it accountable for how our tax dollars are being spent. So far, they’re getting away with it.

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The original of this article can be found at http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/176144/tomgram%3A_william_hartung%2C_how_to_disappear_money%2C_pentagon-style/#more.

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6 Paltrow, op. cit.

7 Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, & Logistics, Report to Congress: Fiscal Year 2014 Inventory of Contracted Services, August 2015, Executive Summary.


16 Lumpe and Ravinsky, op. cit.


23 Alexander, op. cit.


Yet More F-35 Floundering

BY DAN GRAZIER, JACK SHANAHAN FELLOW

The F-35 program was the subject of much discussion in Washington recently. There were conflicting statements about a supposedly crucial software program, and later, program officials found themselves on the defensive after facing some tough questions on Capitol Hill about the most expensive weapon program in the nation’s history.

Critical Logistics Software Not Really that Critical?

Last summer, F-35 program officer Lt. Gen. Chris Bogdan said the F-35’s logistics system was “the brains and blood of operating this weapons system.” Despite many fixes, the aircraft’s Autonomic Logistics Information System (ALIS) is years behind schedule. It is so flawed that government auditors believe the computer system may not be ready to deploy to a combat zone, despite the Marine Corps declaring its variant of the F-35 able to deploy. Its problems may also delay the Air Force’s declaration of Initial Operational Capability, the status that means a system has reached the minimum capability useful in combat. After these findings, General Bogdan, in a surprising twist, claimed that ALIS is not really critical after all, and insisted the F-35 can fly without it for 30 days.

ALIS is the ground-based computer system meant to diagnose mechanical problems, order and track replacement parts, and guide maintenance crews through repairs. It also allows pilots to plan missions and later review their performance. It has been described by senior program officials as “a software-intensive system that connects to almost every piece of the F-35 program” and as “a critical part of the F-35 program.” Secretary Stackley went so far as to say that “ALIS has yet to meet its full promise and we’ll need to go the full distance in that regard if we’re going to succeed in meeting our goals for reducing the ownership cost and increasing the operational availability for this complex aircraft.”

But so far, software flaws have forced maintenance crews to resort to time-consuming workarounds. In one instance, maintainers even had to manually burn data onto CDs and drive off base to send the massive files across a civilian WiFi network. The plane depends upon computer technology and millions of lines of software code to operate. So
the fact that ALIS is years behind schedule and plagued with bugs is particularly disturbing. The Government Accountability Office released a report in April confirming that flaws in ALIS can ground the entire fleet.8

Now, the program office is dismissing the gravity of this finding, putting the office at odds with itself and with the previous statements of senior officials.

For years, F-35 advocates have justified exorbitant spending on this system by saying the plane can’t fly without it. DoD’s most recent estimate puts ALIS spending at $16.7 billion over the life of the F-35, though the GAO report questioned the accuracy of this estimate since a DoD-commission plan found that scheduling delays and other problems “could lead to $20-$100 billion in additional costs.”9 For a price tag that big, someone ought to know if the system is even essential.

Senator Demands Clarification About F-35’s Close Air Support Role

One debate that has been raging, and that is impacted by the F-35 debacle, has been over retiring the A-10 and whether or not the F-35 will be an adequate replacement to perform the close air support mission. Here again the program office has issued a number of conflicting statements on the issue.10 An April Senate hearing on the F-35 program presented the most heated exchange when Senator Kelly Ayotte (R-NH) sought clarification about conflicting statements made by Air Force leaders regarding the mission and which aircraft would perform it.11

Senator Ayotte first mentioned Air Force Chief of Staff General Mark Welsh’s statement in March when he said, “the mission capability of the A-10 will not be replaced by the F-35.” Yet, she pointed out, the F-35 program office’s own webpage clearly states the plane is to replace the A-10.

“Is General Welsh right or is your website right?” she asked F-35 program manager Lt. Gen. Bogdan.

General Bogdan completely dodged the question as being above his paygrade. Frank Kendall, Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisitions, said both statements were correct. “We will replace A-10s with F-35s,” he said. But while the F-35 would perform the mission, it would simply do it very differently than the A-10.

Dr. Michael Gilmore, Director of Operational Test & Evaluation (DOT&E), then produced the F-35’s operational requirements document, which clearly states the F-35 is supposed to replace the A-10.

Senator Ayotte pressed the matter, asking Dr. Gilmore about the upcoming comparative testing pitting the F-35 against the A-10. Both the House and Senate defense authorization bills prohibit the divestment of any additional A-10s until the Air Force submits the report after the completion of the F-35 initial operational test and evaluation (IOT&E), which will include comparative testing.

“Comparison testing just makes common sense,” Dr. Gilmore told the Senator. “If you’re spending a lot of money to get improved capability… the easiest way to demonstrate [that improved capability] is to do a rigorous comparison test.”12

F-35 Chief Explains Block Buy Proposal

Despite all the problems with the F-35, the program office and Lockheed Martin really want Congress to approve a block buy of more than 460 planes over three years.13 They claim the plan would save taxpayers approximately $2 billion over the three-year deal. But recent reports from the GAO14 and the DOT&E15 cast doubts on such claims. The GAO estimates it will cost $1.7 billion to upgrade aircraft purchased before the plane is fully developed to incorporate later design features, and DOT&E expressed concerns that retrofits would be so expensive that some already-purchased aircraft may never be updated. It’s clear that by buying underdeveloped planes, we would more than cancel out most of the expected savings.

DOT&E strongly warned Congress against a block buy at this point in development, citing both the immaturity of the technology and the amount of testing yet to be completed. The DOT&E annual report noted that a block buy would not be consistent with laws in place for multiyear procurement, and asked, “would such a ‘block buy’ be consistent with the intent of Title 10 U.S. Code, which stipulates that [initial operational testing] must be completed and a report on its results provided to Congress before committing to Full-Rate Production—a commitment that some could argue would be made by executing the ‘block buy?’”

In most cases, this kind of purchase is pursued through a multiyear procurement. But in this case the F-35 program and Lockheed want a

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A FITTING TRIBUTE FOR THE

A-10’s Air Force Father

BY DAN GRAZIER, JACK SHANAHAN FELLOW

On a beautiful early spring afternoon, four A-10s flew low over Arlington National Cemetery to honor retired Air Force Colonel Avery Kay, the officer who did more to create the plane than any other.

Colonel Kay led the effort in the 1960s to create a plane specifically designed to support troops on the ground, at enormous risk to his own career and over the strident objections of many of his superiors. In doing so, he demonstrated the kind of moral courage that is unfortunately a rarity in modern military culture.

He had already earned a reputation for courage and innovation before taking charge of the A-X program that started the A-10. He served as the lead navigator of some of the most dangerous bombing raids of WWII, including the famous 1943 Schweinfurt Attack into the heart of Germany’s industrial Ruhr Valley. Nearly 300 B-17 bombers destroyed a significant portion of the German aviation industry in one of the largest raids of the war by attacking a ball-bearing factory.

In the early jet era after WWII, he developed a new approach to training navigators for the incredibly difficult task of guiding large transports and bombers, flying below the enemy’s radar without any electronic aids to find their targets deep in Soviet territory. “Not just a brilliant trainer of master navigators, he personally led clandestine missions to drop paratroopers over Eastern Europe in the early 1950s. These were unquestionably some of the most hazardous missions of the early Cold War,” said his friend Pierre Sprey.

But his toughest battle took place inside the Pentagon.

Since the independent Air Force came into being in 1947, close air support for ground troops has been a contentious issue. Army leaders repeatedly leveled the charge that their needs were not being met by the Air Force, especially in Vietnam, and were frustrated by the average 40 minutes soldiers had to wait until Air Force planes arrived.

Air Force leaders have always been much more interested in deep strike bombers and fighter planes and have been reluctant to dedicate the people and aircraft needed to train for the highly specialized close air support mission.
Colonel Kay found himself in the middle of this debate in the early 1960s, advising Air Force Chief of Staff General John McConnell during the negotiations with Army Chief General Harold Johnson over how to properly divide helicopters and fixed-wing planes between the services. The Air Force wanted control of all fixed-wing aircraft while the Army wanted the helicopters.

Negotiating in good faith, Colonel Kay wrote key parts of the resulting Johnson-McConnell agreement. The Air Force promised to provide all the close air support the Army would ever need in return for the Army’s relinquishing any control over armed fixed-wing planes.

He believed his service would deliver on the commitment they were signing, but within a year or so it became clear to him that Air Force leaders had little interest in allocating the budgets, people, and suitable planes needed to deliver adequate support to troops in battle.

He took this breach of faith personally and felt honor-bound to dedicate the rest of his career to making good on the promise the Air Force had made.

He understood that delivering the promised support to the troops on the ground required an airplane dedicated solely to close air support, but faced the challenge of convincing Air Force leadership to spend precious budget dollars on a mission that interested them little. His brilliant solution was to take advantage of the Army’s ongoing campaign for funding a heavily armed helicopter, the Cheyenne.

Colonel Kay convinced General McConnell that if the Army continued to receive funding for the Cheyenne he would go down in Air Force history as the chief who lost the close air support mission and the money that goes along with it. Despite having little interest in supporting ground troops, McConnell promptly authorized the counterattack that Colonel Kay proposed: an Air Force plane designed to be more lethal, survivable, and affordable than the Cheyenne.

“Not just a brilliant trainer of master navigators, he personally led clandestine missions to drop paratroopers over Eastern Europe in the early 1950s. These were unquestionably some of the most hazardous missions of the early Cold War,” said his friend Pierre Sprey.

But approval from the Chief wasn’t enough to ensure the plane would be built. He also had to defeat the entrenched Air Force bureaucracy.

Colonel Kay found little support in the Air Staff and Tactical Air Command offices that normally worked to build new planes. Instead, he found what he needed in the Secretary of Defense’s office. At the time, Pierre Sprey worked for the Secretary, and had written a paper detailing how all of the planes designed for deep strike missions then in the Air Force inventory were useless against the hordes of Soviet tanks which could be expected to roll across central Europe in the event the Cold War turned hot. Colonel Kay read the paper and went outside of authorized channels to enlist Sprey in helping to create a dedicated close support aircraft.

Largely working in secret, they identified the critical characteristics needed for a successful design: extreme maneuverability at slow speeds, the ability to loiter for a long time over the battlefield, the ability to take a few hits and keep flying so it could fly low and close to the enemy, and a massive cannon.

These requirements were written and sent out to aircraft manufacturers. Following a true fly-off between competing designs, Fairchild Republic won the contract to build the revolutionary A-10. Eventually 715 A-10s were built. They have been supporting troops on the ground ever since.

Colonel Kay had risen rapidly through the ranks throughout his career. That came to an abrupt halt after his involvement in the creation of the A-10. He retired from the Air Force in August 1976 without having ever been promoted to General, and settled quietly in Scottsdale, Arizona. He died on his 96th birthday on October 29, 2015, without ever receiving in life the recognition he so justly deserved.

A fitting tribute finally came on March 11, 2016, at Arlington National Cemetery where he was buried with full military honors. Four A-10s in level formation flew low over the Pentagon, directly toward the gathered mourners. Everyone stood silently as the planes approached, their eyes fixed on the imposing sight. No sound from the planes could be heard until they were directly overhead. Sudden, just at the moment the distinctive sound of their engines could be heard, one plane peeled away from the rest and seemed to fly straight into the sky in the “missing man” formation, a traditional salute for fallen flyers.

The plane Colonel Kay created, that has proven itself again and again in combat, roared over the building that fought its creation and is still trying to kill it these many years later. Yet the A-10—and Colonel Avery Kay’s legacy—lives on.
Chuck Myers, “Fighter Mafia” Veteran

BY DAN GRAZIER, JACK SHANAHAN FELLOW

A valued member of the military reform movement and “Fighter Mafia” co-conspirator died on May 9 at the age of 91. He played an active role in developing many of the tactical aircraft that still serve as the backbone of the fleet: the F-16, F-18, and A-10.

His military service began shortly after he turned 18, when he joined the Army Air Forces during WWII. He became a B-25 pilot—one of the war’s youngest—and flew low-level attack missions to destroy Japanese shipping in the Pacific with the 345th Bomb Group.

Myers left the Army Air Forces in October 1945 to study mechanical engineering at Lafayette College, where he continued to fly with an Air Force reserve unit.

Looking for a new challenge following graduation, he joined the Navy. He qualified as a jet pilot and flew F9F Panther jets during the Korean War. Lieutenant Myers was later selected to attend the US Navy Test Pilot School, graduating in 1954. He spent two years conducting test flights for the Navy before going to work for the Convair aircraft company as a civilian test pilot.

In the early 1960s, the Department of Defense started working on the Tactical Fighter Experimental, or “TFX.” Lockheed’s proposal for the new plane was designed to perform five missions: air superiority, close air support, all-weather attack, nuclear attack, and interception. This eventually became the F-111. Myers immediately recognized the shortcomings of multi-role aircraft. He knew the design compromises needed to make it multi-role would prevent it from performing any of them well.

He spent the next several years selling the idea of mission-specific aircraft. John Boyd and Tom Christie were developing their groundbreaking “Energy-Maneuverability (EM)” theory. With EM charts, designers can accurately plot how an aircraft performs in flight, as well as compare performance between different planes. Myers recognized that the EM charts could show the F-111 would be easily outmaneuvered by the latest Soviet designs.

Myers eventually convinced enough people within the Pentagon that they should pursue mission-specific aircraft. He convinced Air Force leadership to assign Boyd to the “Fighter Experimental” program, the
successor to the F-111. This program resulted in the successful F-15. Myers became the Director for Air Warfare in the Office of the Secretary of Defense in 1973. As part of the Tactical Programs Department, and working with the burgeoning “Fighter Mafia,” he oversaw all research and development for the tactical aircraft then in development. This group included Boyd, Everest Riccioni, Pierre Sprey, and Myers. Their collaboration created the Lightweight Fighter program, which ultimately produced the F-16 and F-18.

To convince people of the need for a dedicated close air support plane, Myers set up targets to look like tanks on his rural Virginia farm and then flew officials involved in the debate in his own small plane a few hundred feet over the ground. He asked them to spot the targets. Most had difficulty doing so. “If it is this hard to do flying at 150 miles per hour, how hard would it be at 400?” he would ask.

Myers acknowledged that many in the services and the defense industry considered him to be, in his own words, “a pain in the ass.” He attributed this to a desire to challenge the conventional wisdom and question the way business was being done.

“You’ve got to be free to think about things outside your normal envelope. I haven’t had a normal envelope. It’s the nature of my life,” he said.

The Virginia Aeronautical Historical Society inducted Myers into its Hall of Fame in 1999.

He was laid to rest at Culpeper National Cemetery on June 17, 2016.

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The original of this article can be found at http://www.pogo.org/straus/issues/military-people-and-ideas/2016/pogo-remembers-chuck-myers.html.

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**F-35 FLOUNDERING CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7**

block buy. The difference may seem like Beltway semantics, but the difference is important for taxpayers.

Congress typically authorizes most weapons buying programs on a year-by-year basis to ensure proper oversight and to maintain incentives for the contractor to satisfactorily perform. Federal law allows agencies to also use multiyear contracts to purchase government property so long as certain criteria have been met. Specifically, for a program to be eligible for multiyear procurement the contract must promote national security, should result in substantial savings, have little chance of being reduced, and have a stable design. The F-35 seems to be failing at least two of the first three criteria and is most certainly failing the fourth. The operational testing that needs to take place for an informed final production decision will not be completed until 2022 at the earliest.

So while multiyear contracts at least afford some protections to the taxpayers, block buys provide significantly fewer. As a Congressional Research Service report points out, block buy contracts are not governed by any precautionary statutory requirements and savings can be lower than those promised under multiyear procurement.16

General Bogdan later justified the block buy request, saying it doesn’t commit the government to purchasing a set number of aircraft in a way a multiyear purchase agreement would; it just allows contractors to purchase production materials in bulk and the government gets the savings that result. When asked about the timing of the plan, specifically trying to lock down the deal before IOT&E even begins, he said there is no legal requirement for IOT&E to be complete before a block buy can begin.

No matter how F-35 officials try to spin the argument, buying more F-35s at this point is a bad deal for the men and women who will take them into harm’s way and for the American people who have to foot the bill.
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POGO Remembers Chuck Myers, “Fighter Mafia” Veteran
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