

Lockheed A-12 #60-6926

May 24, 1963

The Lockheed A-12 was built for the Central Intelligence Agency as a high-speed, high-altitude reconnaissance platform. It was the predecessor to the YF-12 interceptor prototype, the M-21 drone launcher, and the SR-71 Blackbird. The CIA randomly chose the code name "Oxcart" for the research and development program to replace the Lockheed U-2 aircraft. The "A" stood for the aircraft's internal code name "Archangel", and it was the 12th design effort in the program. Flight crews sometimes referred to it as "Cygnus", in keeping with Lockheed's practice of naming aircraft after celestial bodies. Fifteen airframes were built between 1962 and 1964, and the type was operational between 1963 and 1968.

#60-6926, also known as "Article 123", was the third A-12 built, and was also the first program loss. On May 24, 1963, it took off from the U.S. Air Force test facility at Groom Lake, Nevada, with CIA pilot Kenneth S. Collins at the controls. It was the aircraft's 79th flight, a subsonic engine testing mission. While flying in clouds at 34,000 feet the pitot tube froze, giving an incorrect airspeed reading. The incorrect data caused the stability augmentation system to pitch the nose upward and stall the aircraft. It then entered a flat spin from which Collins was unable to recover. He ejected at 25,000 feet and parachuted down near Highway 93 outside of Wendover, Utah. The A-12 crashed a short distance away, and Collins was soon approached by men in a truck who offered him a ride to the wreck. He gave them a prearranged story that it was an F-105 with a nuclear weapon on board, in order to keep people away from the classified aircraft. They drove him to Wendover, where he phoned the proper authorities. Within two hours Air Force, CIA, and Lockheed personnel secured the site and began a two-day effort to remove all traces of the aircraft. An investigation team found that inadequate pitot tube heating had caused the accident. Special thanks to Craig Fuller and Dave McCurry for help with locating this crash site. Site visited on 4/29/21.











CIA pilot Kenneth S. Collins (Courtesy of CIA and Roadrunners Internationale)



#60-6926 in flight (Courtesy of Tony Landis and www.habu.org)