

Strategic US Military Intel Base in Pine Gap, Australia

By [Richard Neville](#)

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PINE GAP MIND GAP: A TERROR CELL THAT NEVER SLEEPS

Once considered a wasteland, the vast red desert in Central Australia is a global hub of spiritual tourism. Each day hordes of pilgrims arrive at Alice Springs, equip themselves with 4-wheel drives, swags, maps and emergency rations, then set off to seek renewal. On tracks to remote gorges, sometimes dotted with the detritus of failed cattle stations, tourists in hats with fly-nets file towards the sacred hot spots. During a trek on the rim of Kings Canyon in Watarrka National Park, our path descended beside a string of pools shaded by ancient Cycad palms to an astonishing oasis known as the Garden of Eden. Spinifex pigeons darted and chirped. Elsewhere, as the Toyota bounces across dry riverbeds, rocks up on the bank near the gorge reveal carvings predating the times of Moses, providing survival tips for future generations (likelihood of game, location of sacred waterholes). Such messages are humbling. They re-connect us with antiquity and remind us that the quality of information can make the difference between life and death. Information is also at the heart of modern warfare.



Messages from dreamtime. Missiles from Pine Gap

On the flight from Sydney to Alice Springs the desert unfolds for hours beneath the window. On descent it is possible to glimpse a space age compound on the sand backed by the MacDonnell Ranges and distinguished by a clump of enormous white pop art “golf balls”. This is Pine Gap, a US military base built on the traditional land of the indigenous Arrernte people, which started life in 1966. Australians were told the facility was to be a weather station. Later the official cover was a “Space Research Centre”. Our citizens remained in the dark until 1975, when Prime Minister Whitlam revealed that Pine Gap’s boss, Richard Stallings, was an agent of the CIA.

Up till then, according to former Minister Clyde Cameron, politicians had regarded the base as “a pretty harmless sort of operation”. Whitlam demanded a list of all CIA agents in the country. This infuriated US spy masters, who put pressure on the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) to shut him up. CIA fears over the leaking of Pine Gaps’ secret activities helped to trigger the murky events that toppled the Whitlam government.

Pine Gap’s first generation of satellites was designed to monitor Soviet missile developments and for espionage in South East Asia, especially Vietnam, and later to spy on China. Since then, both its mission and capabilities have expanded dramatically. The base is believed to have provided targeting information for Israel’s 2006 bombing of Lebanon.



FRUIT AND CARDBOARD SOAKED IN BLOOD

Pine Gap is one of the largest and most sophisticated satellite ground stations in the world. Its 26 antennas suck information from the sky and distribute it to US commanders in the field, including in Iraq and Afghanistan, where it is used to co-ordinate air strikes. In the 2003 “shock and awe” invasion of Baghdad, Pine Gap’s space-based signal intercepts of phone calls made by Iraq’s Generals, led directly to the US Air Force strikes against the country’s leadership. According to defense expert [Richard Tanter](#), “all decapitation strikes missed their nominal targets, but resulted in the deaths of large numbers of Iraqi civilians”.

There were over 50 Pine Gap directed strikes in the invasion phase. Of four investigated by [Human Rights Watch](#), 42 civilians were killed and zero soldiers. This averages 13 casualties per strike, which, when multiplied by 50, totals 650 corpses. During this time the Australian media and star commentators were waxing lyrical about the Pentagon’s “precision bombing”.



Pine Gap

Baghdad

Australian anti war campaigner, Donna Mulhearn, was in Baghdad in March 2003 when a missile struck the Al Shuala markets, killing over 60 civilians. Donna took a bus to the site and found “complete devastation with pieces of iron and tin mangled into grotesque shapes. Mashed pieces of fruit and cardboard were soaked in the blood and mud, along with pieces of human flesh”. Hundreds were injured and the hospitals lacked anaesthetics.

THE MAN WHO MIGHT HAVE RULED IRAQ

The US military denied responsibility. British journalist Robert Fisk found a serial number on a fragment of the weapon’s metal in the rubble, which was traced back to the Raytheon corporation, a provider of space and airborne missile and surveillance systems. Raytheon has sole responsibility for maintenance at Pine Gap. In Al Shuala a grieving Shi-ite asked Mulhearn, “Do your people accept this, the killing of children? Do western people have no honour?”

When she found her way to a bus, her eyes stinging with tears, Donna noticed the bloodstains on her boots. “The sight was shocking and caused my body to shake, then go limp”, she recalled. Her first instinct was to “find a corner somewhere in the outskirts of the world and curl up to weep forever”, but that was not to be. She found another option – to stand up as a witness to war crimes. It was this decision that would later take Donna Mulhearn to Pine Gap.



Joint attack facility

Shortly after aerial massacre at Al Shuala, the Americans bombed the palatial dwelling of

Mudher al-Kharbit, a construction magnate who had been secretly advising officials from the CIA on how to unite Iraq's tribal leaders to rise up against Saddam Hussein. "If that effort had succeeded", reported the New York Times in April this year, "Mr. Kharbit might have become the ruler of Iraq". Instead, the bomb killed more than a dozen of Kharbit's family. The intelligence that led to this air strike was almost certainly provided by Pine Gap, and it was not entirely baseless. For reasons [related to tribal obligations](#), Saddam Hussein was hiding at the Kharbit compound that night, but in a separate villa, and emerged unscathed. As well as wiping out Kharbit's family, the bombing killed 21 other people, including children.



Shock and Awe 2003. Today US missiles are still raining down on Baghdad

THE MEDIA ASLEEP AT THE WHEEL



According to the NY Times, "the fury it aroused has been widely believed to have helped kick-start the insurgency in western Iraq". Another question arises. If the intelligence was accurate about the presence of Saddam Hussein, it is likely the US military was aware of the presence of innocent civilians, including women and children. But who wants to think about that? Probably not the people who work at Pine Gap. If Australia wishes to regain its reputation as a fair minded nation, the government will need to take a closer look at this secretive installation, an integral part of the US National Missile Defense scheme, or Star Wars.

It aims to put satellite based weapons in space to shoot down any incoming missiles. New radomes (radar + dome) to accommodate the system have already been installed.

The majority of Pine Gap's 1000 staff are Americans drawn from branches of the US military, including the National Security Agency, Army and Navy Information Operations Command, US Navy and Combined Support Group, Air Intelligence Agency, US Air Force, 704th Military Intelligence Brigade, 743rd Military Intelligence Battalion, Marine Cryptologic Support Command, etc. The base is described as a "joint facility", although key areas are out of bounds to Australians. While visiting US lawmakers are taken on tours of Pine Gap, Federal MP's are denied entry. (Members of Congress have collectively invested up to \$US196 million in companies with Defense Department contracts, [earning millions since the onset of the Iraq invasion](#). Until May 2007, Hillary Clinton held holdings in Honeywell, Boeing and - yes - Raytheon).

In 2000, the Howard Government rejected calls by Parliament's Joint Committee on Treaties for a classified briefing on its operations. There is no public debate on the role of Pine Gap, despite its unbending support of all US military actions, regardless of legality or morality. As for the media, they're asleep at the wheel.

CRIMINALS ROAMING THE OUTBACK?

Pine Gap hosts the largest CIA facility outside America, so it is reasonable to assume that crimes against humanity, such the kidnap of suspects and their transport to torture zones, have been aided by the capacities of Pine Gap. Day after day, its intelligence kills people. If

you regard this is an exaggeration, visit the [US Airforce website](#) and click the link marked “airpower summary”, which reveals the number of daily missions conducted in Iraq and Afghanistan. Most of these involve air strikes, around a 100 a day, or 36,500 a year, which explains why Pine Gap operates around the clock.



Raytheon means the ‘Light of the Gods’ – the dark Gods

On a December midnight in 2005, after seeking the permission of a traditional custodian of the Arrernte land, four resolute Christians trudged across the central desert with bolt cutters. One of the party was Donna Mulhearn, whose visit to Baghdad led her to bone up on the activities of Pine Gap. The group cut through two fences, scrambled on a rooftop and unfurled their banner: WHAT HAVE YOU DONE? YOUR BROTHER’S BLOOD CRIES OUT TO ME. Security guards surrounded them. One shouted, “Get on your knees”.

“That’s a good idea”, said one of the group, and prayed to God that the guard would one day cease his co-operation with the violence of Pine Gap. The Christians explained they had entered the base to carry out a Citizen’s Inspection. (A few days before, the facility had been inspected by John Negroponte, the former US Ambassador to Iraq and Director of National Intelligence, who is now Deputy Secretary of State. Renowned for his “dirty work in Honduras” in the 1980’s, Negroponte has long been accused of complicity with [human rights abuses, torture and assassinations](#).)



Adele Goldie inspecting the facilities

The four pacifists were arrested, charged with entering a prohibited area and put on trial. One of the defendants, Jim Dowling, told the jury that after Nuremberg, citizens had the right and a duty to take action against a government guilty of war crimes. “When an Apache gunship approaches a target in Iraq”, noted defendant Bryan Law, “it will be receiving data transferred from Pine Gap. When a missile is directed at that target, the information will also have come from Pine Gap”. (The helicopters are still at it. In March this year, six Sunni fighters from the “Awakening” movement allied to the US, were killed in [strikes by an AH-64 Apache helicopter](#) in Samarra, Iraq, their bodies loaded onto a pickup.)

In March 2003, Donna Mulhearn had witnessed the results of missile strikes on civilians and she asked the jury to “honour the humanity of the unknown person whose blood is on my boots”.

STRIKING AT THE HEART OF NATIONAL SECURITY

Expert witnesses called by the defense to illuminate the operations of Pine Gap were ruled inadmissible by the Alice Springs court, as such testimony was deemed contrary to the national interest. The “Pine Gap Four” were convicted and fined. The government appealed. The prosecutor demanded a jail term, stating the actions of the Christians “struck at the heart of national security”. The case dragged on until March this year, when the defendants were unexpectedly acquitted because their witnesses had been prevented from giving evidence.

The trial received scant attention. The courthouse was not ringed with demonstrators. The Australian community remains uninformed about the case and its implications.



One of the defendants was interviewed on ABC radio's Law Report to discuss the legal niceties of the proceedings – not the nasty side of Pine Gap. Dream on Australia! The much-hailed withdrawal of our troops from Iraq is an irrelevant shadow play, because the cut and thrust of the terror war is orchestrated from a military base in Central Australia, impervious to investigation.

What if Pine Gap had stuck to its originally claimed role of monitoring weather? The world might have received an early warning on global warming; and the Central Desert, the soul of Australia, would not now be disfigured by an American controlled intelligence weapon of mass destruction.



Outside Alice Springs courthouse: Jim Dowling, Bryan Law, Adele Goldie, Donna Mulhearn

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