

***RETIRED MEN'S ASSOCIATION OF GREENWICH, Inc. (RMA)
invites you to attend its meeting, on Wednesday, Jan. 15, 2014.
First Presbyterian Church, Lafayette Pl., Greenwich, CT.***

MARTY YELLIN

THE HEXAGON SPY SATELLITE—A FORTY-FIVE YEAR SECRET



Marty Yellin built spy satellites for a living. He was recruited in 1965 by Perkin-Elmer in Wilton, CT to work on Project Hexagon, also known as Big Bird. He was to be part of what grew to be a 1,000 person team tasked with designing a camera to be mounted in a “reconnaissance spacecraft” to take photographs of interest to the CIA. By 1970, Big Bird flew; the team had designed and built the camera. Each mission began with four film capsules housing a total of 60

miles of film, and the vehicle orbited the earth every 90 minutes, snapping vast panoramic photographs, including close-range pictures of Soviet missiles, submarine pens, and war exercises. Big Bird also assisted Israel during the 1973 Yom Kippur War by photographing Egyptian troop movements. Because of the program’s secrecy, he had to keep everyone else in the dark, including his wife; and he travelled under aliases. As he would later explain, it felt like being in witness protection. Hexagon created a tremendous amount of stability because it meant American decision makers were not operating in the dark. Speaking of which, the film was so light sensitive that it could only be handled by blind technicians. At the time, Hexagon was the most complex system put into space. But even as its technology was being developed, Hexagon was being superseded by the next generation, KH-11, an electro-optical system that provided real-time capability; today all spy satellite systems are entirely digital.

Mr. Yellin earned a B.A. and M.A. in engineering from CCNY, and a Ph.D. from NYU in Biomedical Engineering, a brand new field applying engineering solutions to medical problems. While at Perkin-Elmer, he moved on to help design and manage parts of the Hubble Space Telescope, the most productive space instrument ever built. He left Perkin-Elmer in 1990. Still, he couldn’t discuss the program with anyone until October, 2011, when the program was declassified. He remains busy today taking courses in genetics and cell biology at Yale and NYU.

Our business meetings begin at 10, and our speakers are scheduled for 10:30. No Charge and No Reservations are required. For additional information, call Bernard Schneider, 203-698-2558; bgsesq@gmail.com. More information about the RMA and its speakers can be found on our web site, greenwichrma.org.