

WATCHING THE SUN COME UP IN THE WEST

Harlen Hain, a retired military pilot and Optimist member from Bellevue, NE, described to Club members his experience piloting the SR-71 Blackbird aircraft. This is a long-range supersonic reconnaissance plane capable of flying over three times the speed of sound at altitudes over 80,000 ft. Hain explained he started his career in the military as a pilot in the Korean War and flew four engine bombers such as the B-47 and B-52. He was assigned to the Offutt Air Base for a very secret new program that involved the SR-71. The SR-71 was designed to replace the U-2 reconnaissance plane which flew too slow and too low as witnessed by the downing of Gary Powers over the Soviet Union in 1960. The SR-71 design was developed in the late 1950's and early 1960's. President Johnson announced it to the public in 1964. Hain noted there were 32 planes built and there were 6 planes in the air at all times. The aircraft was designed with peripheral surveillance with six cameras on each side so it didn't have to fly over enemy territory. Hain explained that pilots of the SR-71 suited up like astronauts. The suits initially cost \$16,000, but later versions cost \$60,000. Hain noted the plane holds 80,000 gal. of fuel, but it couldn't take off loaded. Immediately after take off it was fueled in the air from specially outfitted KC-135 tanker planes flying as fast as possible at about 27,000 ft. The SR-71 could only hold enough fuel for 1.5 hr. of flight time, it was refueled again for the return to base. Hain explained that flying towards the west at Mach 3.2 cruising speed allowed him to observe the sun rise in the west as he was flying much faster than the earth's rotation. Also, at the cruising altitude of 80,000 ft. he could see the curvature of the earth on the horizon. After three decades of amazing performance with aircraft records that still stand, the SR-71 program was replaced by unmanned satellites.