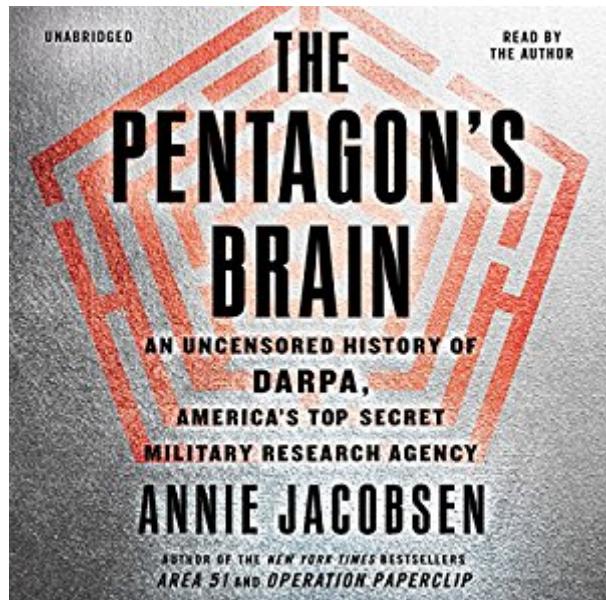


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The Pentagon's Brain: An Uncensored History Of DARPA, America's Top-Secret Military Research Agency



Synopsis

The definitive history of DARPA, the Defense Advanced Research Project Agency, from the author of the New York Times best seller Area 51. No one has ever written the history of the Defense Department's most secret, most powerful, and most controversial military science R&D agency. In the first-ever history of the organization, New York Times best-selling author Annie Jacobsen draws on inside sources, exclusive interviews, private documents, and declassified memos to paint a picture of DARPA, or "the Pentagon's brain", from its Cold War inception in 1958 to the present. This is the book on DARPA - a compelling narrative about this clandestine intersection of science and the American military and the often frightening results.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"The Pentagon's Brain" is a comprehensive history of DARPA which puts the activities of the agency since its formation in the 1950s in perspective. The volume starts by describing the founding of the agency as a response to the scientific and technological threat posed by the Soviet Union and describes the political maneuvering involved in making the organization as independent as possible. The book takes stock of many of the projects and paradigms DARPA has worked on since the beginning. Not surprisingly, early work focused on nuclear weapons, missile defense, spy satellites and submarine warfare, topics that were all relevant to the Cold War. With time the agency's mandate expanded to cover 'psychological warfare' and more human intelligence-centric projects. The book does a good job portraying the controversial activities of DARPA and its

advisors, an elite group of scientists called the JASONs, during the Vietnam war. Later work by the agency was also not without controversy, like its advocacy of the missile defense shield Star Wars and its use of codebreaking that could be used to spy on the country's own citizens. Described too are peaceful inventions which DARPA pioneered such as health interventions on the battlefield, the Internet and the Human Terrain Project developed during the recent Iraq War which was gained at understanding populations in occupied countries; as the book says however, even such more benign endeavors often backfired since the information gained from them could cause resentment among occupied populations. For me, two aspects of the book were particularly revealing.

If you're familiar with the history of the computer industry, you're no doubt aware that the Internet was conceived and developed by a U.S. Government agency called DARPA (the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency). Chances are that you don't know that DARPA also invented drones both big and tiny, Agent Orange, the M16 Assault Rifle, sophisticated sensor technology, the F117A stealth fighter jet, MIRVs (Multiple Independently Targetable Reentry Vehicles) that carry nuclear weapons, the Ballistic Missile Early Warning System, robotic soldiers and a slew of other military weapons systems, most of them still top secret. Remember Total Information Awareness, the predecessor to the massive data collection programs of the NSA that Edward Snowden revealed? DARPA was responsible for that one, too. The agency's work also gave birth to less lethal technologies, including real-time video processing, noise reduction, image enhancement, and data compression. It's difficult to exaggerate the impact of this little-known agency. All this comes to light in the pages of journalist Annie Jacobsen's *The Pentagon's Brain*, the first full-length study of America's secretive military research agency. DARPA's mission DARPA was created by President Dwight D. Eisenhower over the strenuous objections of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and just about everyone else in the military establishment. Its mission is to create revolutions in military science and to maintain technological dominance over the rest of the world. No doubt there are many in the military and in conservative circles who are thrilled at how successful the agency has been in fulfilling its mission, their original unhappiness notwithstanding. The rest of us should be scared. Very scared.

In the last decade, I have written and spoken extensively about GPS. I am the co-author of *GPS Declassified: From Smart Bombs to Smartphones*, a narrative history of its invention and development. Recently, I was listening to a podcast of an interview with Annie Jacobson at the Spy Museum. I was surprised that she credited DARPA with the creation of GPS, since NONE of my

research supports this. So I got a copy of her book to see what it claims. On pages 249-250, she makes many incorrect statements: "DARPA's pioneering GPS program was called TRANSIT." • Transit was the first satellite based navigation system; it was conceptualized in 1958. DARPA played a major role in the program by funding it. GPS refers to a later system begun in 1973. Transit was NEVER called GPS. • After several failed launches, TRANSIT finally took up residence in space in June 1963. To deny enemy access to this kind of precise targeting information, the system was originally designed with an offset built in, called selective availability (SA). • Selective availability was a degradation of the civilian signal for GPS. It was not used on Transit, which was much less precise. • In 1973, the Pentagon ordered DARPA to create a single system shared by all the military services. • As I mentioned, she made a similar statement at the Spy Museum. This is incorrect. On April 17, 1973, Deputy Secretary of Defense William P. Clements, Jr., ordered the Air Force to be the executive service for a Joint Program Office for the Defense Navigation Satellite System (later called GPS). It was to be a joint Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force Program Office. DARPA was not mentioned because it played no role in the 1973 JPO.

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