

Aviation Nation 2009

by Peter Ediger

Last night I was reading Vincent Harding's book *Martin Luther King: The Inconvenient Hero*. This morning Jim Haber and I go to the Nellis Air Force Base Open House. I slip on the NDE T-shirt with the King quote:

"A nation that continues to spend more money on military might than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death."

That quote keeps haunting me as I join the celebrative crowd on this beautiful Fall morning. There is something awesome about those Thunderbirds racing across the sky. There is something awesome about what we humans can do. What could happen, I wonder, if we would invest the amazing human and material resources which we build into our military into programs of social uplift instead?

A few people in the crowd comment positively on my T-shirt. But when I take a picture of Jim posing in front of the Predator drone, holding a sign saying "Drones kill people and peace," while I'm holding a sign saying "In God we trust??" with the God xed out and the predator inserted, several security guards take note. They escort us to an area where the Deputy Director for Security at Nellis, William Garrett, asks us about our purpose in being there. He asks us to not display the signs and for me to remove the T-shirt. We agree on the signs, but I indicate I'll keep the T-shirt on. Jim has a letter written to Col. Gertsen, Commander of Creech Air Force Base, expressing our concern about the drones. He asks Mr Garrett to deliver it to the General. He assures Jim he will do that.

We go back to the drones. I get into a vigorous discussion with a Christian who is convinced God wants to kill our enemies, and that it's rude for me to wear the King t-shirt at this occasion. I'm left with the question, how close to spiritual death are we?

Jim Haber adds: One of the airmen acting as docents for the UAVs on display confirmed a couple of technical questions that arise in people's minds. One is that training still happens at Creech AFB, but most of training for UAVs is being transferred to Holloman AFB in New Mexico to make room for more active mission control at Creech. Drone operators aren't in the old trailers as they once were. New buildings now house UAV crews. He also said that crews at Creech don't operate missions in Pakistan, just Iraq and Afghanistan. They had a video display of a plane on the ground at the air show. The image was taken by a Predator in the air 10 miles away and 20,000 feet above ground. No wonder people often don't know they're being watched.