D-Labs proving hard to cut

By Joe Kasdi

Charles Stark Draper wants to see the guidance labs, named after his late father, remain as part of MIT. So do the 2,000 people who work at them, which once provided a large part of the university's income. But efforts by MIT, despite the severe financial difficulties that will result from the divestment of the labs, remain publicly committed to the plan. It is too late, however, to change the decision that was made between the 40-year-old lab and the Institute.

Both Presidents Howard Johnson and Jerome Wiesner have called for the retention of the D-Labs' budget. One day after MIT decided to spin-off the labs, Draper wrote to Wiesner, chairman of the Sub-Committee on Defense, proposing an alternative direction of the labs that bear his name.

No viable change

"Doc" Draper, speaking in an interview completed with civilian and military commentators, said that he identified no viable changes in the labs' attitudes. John D. Hunter, MIT's provost, who commended the efforts of the labs beyond July 1967, had expected to complete the spin-off by July 1971. The general strike that would shut them down prevented this.

"The people who work here have known what was happening before the defense research controversy began. We have six thousand scientists and engineers, and hardly anyone has left because of second thoughts or changed their opinion about the propriety and need for this kind of research," Draper said.

"Most of the people working here are doing the things they want to do," said D-Lab Vice-President Robert Duffy, "because they think it's important. And also, because we're good at it. However, we're trying really hard to expand into the commercial applications of guidance technology such as the inertial guidance systems on the 747 and into other transportation. As a matter of fact, in two years, we've increased our commercial contracts by a factor of six."

"In 1969, the labs began defense research rather reluctantly during the first Apollo moon missions. During the first Apollo moon missions, the labs were vital to American security in a world where the Russians couldn't be trusted. "The most destabilizing thing there is, is to appear weak. Our opposite numbers in the Soviet Union are dedicated to advancing the technology of their country in these areas. We're here to maintain the strategic balance and generate respect among potential rivals. "The only crime we've committed is being too good. We can do things here that can't be done elsewhere and from a duty standpoint, you feel driven to do what you do well.

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Charles Stark Draper, the labs' founder, has been a respected engineer for decades. During the first Apollo moon missions, the labs were vital to American security in a world where the Russians couldn't be trusted. "The most destabilizing thing there is, is to appear weak. Our opposite numbers in the Soviet Union are dedicated to advancing the technology of their country in these areas. We're here to maintain the strategic balance and generate respect among potential rivals. "The only crime we've committed is being too good. We can do things here that can't be done elsewhere and from a duty standpoint, you feel driven to do what you do well.

The Technical and Research Institute (TRI) has been providing a free, quality education to MIT students for over a century. Now, it's hard to say what it will be like after a complete spin-off. We're working toward becoming a private, non-profit corporation. But that takes a lot of money to set up new services now offered by MIT. Another question is how MIT can still receive overhead money it needs from DOD for the next few years. The Defense Department is asking if MIT does not provide the services the labs closed to function after it is spun-off, on what basis can we still get MIT five or seven million a year?"

Educational ties

Though doubts hang over the labs' future course, both Draper and Duffy hope the labs' and their relations with MIT won't change too much. R and D teams there have always had almost unlimited freedom to pursue any aspect of guidance technology; it's unlikely that complete divestment will result in more esoteric defense research. Draper, though, considers the educational efforts of the labs very valuable to MIT and is pushing to retain them. A great number of the labs' personnel arc as the Aero and Astro Department faculty a day care able to offer their students a "free and clear opportunity to do whatever they want" at the labs. "Our education is a fine, real-world engineering." Starting as a laboratory of the Aero and Astro Department 40 years ago, the labs began defense research rather reluctantly during the first Apollo moon missions. During the first Apollo moon missions, the labs were vital to American security in a world where the Russians couldn't be trusted. "The most destabilizing thing there is, is to appear weak. Our opposite numbers in the Soviet Union are dedicated to advancing the technology of their country in these areas. We're here to maintain the strategic balance and generate respect among potential rivals. "The only crime we've committed is being too good. We can do things here that can't be done elsewhere and from a duty standpoint, you feel driven to do what you do well.

"When the students were attacking the labs two years ago, they were knocking off a capability that's important in international relations. The students that Novem ber didn't realize that many of us are WWII veterans and think what we're doing is right and necessary. We don't want to stay part of MIT but are for spin-off if it allows us to do defense work. The ones who tried to shut us down didn't know what the score here is; I think they were misguided."

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