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\$1.50 DESIGNATED AREAS HIGHER 54 PAGES © 2013 WST WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2013

Army lets air out of spyship project

Canceled war-zone craft cost \$297 million but sells for \$301,000.

By W. J. HENNIGAN

Near the height of the Afghanistan war, the Pentagon spent \$297 million on a seven-story blimp-like aircraft — as long as a football field — that would hover over the war zone for weeks at a time, beaming back crucial intelligence.

But as the military wound down its presence in the Middle East, plans for the unmanned floating spy center deflated. The aircraft fell behind schedule, became 12,000 pounds overweight and was ultimately canceled after just one test flight.

Last month, the Pentagon quietly decided to sell back the sophisticated spyship to the British company that built it for \$301,000 — a fraction of its investment.

The U.S. Army's Long Endurance Multi-Intelligence Vehicle was initially touted as a revolutionary aviation concept that would give troops on the ground an uninterrupted view of the war zone.

Now, in the current federal budget environment, the program stands as an example of military waste.

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) asked why it took so long to cancel it. [See **Blimp**, A8]



Photographs by RICHARD FAUSSET Los Angeles Times

MEMBERS OF Nuevo Leon state's new Civil Force patrol in Monterrey. The city's challenges demonstrate that solving Mexico's organized crime problem will require more than just swapping out old cops for new ones.

MEXICO UNDER SIEGE

City's pall of crime lifting

Monterrey has made strides, but the battle is not yet won

By RICHARD FAUSSET

MONTERREY, Mexico — It is one of those small, hopeful signs that this traumatized city may be awakening from the nightmare of Mexico's drug wars: Armando Alanis once again feels safe enough to stop off for a late-night nosh at Tacos Los Quiques, a beloved sidewalk food cart.

"We couldn't have done this two years ago," Alanis, a 44-year-old poet, said recently as he chowed down on tacos *gringas* in the dim glow of inner-city streetlights. "It would be wrong not to recognize what we have regained."

But Alanis, like most residents of Monterrey, knows that he lives in a city that is



AT THE Casino Royale in Monterrey, where the Zetas drug gang set a fire that killed more than 50 people in 2011, crosses commemorate the dead.

only half-saved. That night, he would drive over the cobblestone streets of Barrio Antiguo, once the premier night-life zone, pointing out the near-lifeless streets that previously were packed with revelers. He pointed to the bullet holes in the wall of the Cafe Iguana, where four people were slain in May 2011.

Later, he would drive to the Casino Royale, where the ruthless Zetas drug gang set a fire that killed more than 50 people that year. The building remains a burned-out husk, its fence adorned with white crosses commemorating the dead.

These days, the headline-grabbing horrors that exploded three years ago — the running street battles, the dumped or hanging bodies [See **Mexico**, A5]

Inquiry into EDD glitches sought

Payments to as many as 300,000 jobless Californians were affected. Contractor defends its software.

By RICARDO LOPEZ, MARC LIFSHER AND SHAN LI

Problems are growing worse for the state's Employment Development Department after a new computer system backfired, leaving some Californians without much-needed benefit checks for weeks.

The agency initially said 80,000 unemployment claims were stalled when the software went online over Labor Day weekend. But internal emails obtained by The Times show the system was riddled with glitches that stopped payment to as many as 300,000 claimants.

Now lawmakers want answers. The Assembly is setting up a hearing to determine what went wrong with a system that cost taxpayers \$10 million, almost double the original estimate.

Some blame the EDD's slow response to the problem that created the massive backlog of claims. Others are pointing fingers at a familiar name around the halls of Sacramento: Deloitte Consulting.

The New York firm is one of the state's biggest contractors and has a history of delivering projects over budget and with problematic results. Deloitte also has been blamed for similar troubles with upgrades to unemployment software in Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Florida.

"We keep hiring the same company, and they keep having the same issues," said Sen. Anthony Cannella (R-Ceres). "At some point, it's on us for hiring the same company. It's faulty logic, and we've got to get better."

Cannella and another state senator are calling on the Senate's Labor and Industrial Relations Committee, which oversees the EDD, to investigate the contract. The Assembly Insurance Committee, which oversees California's unemployment benefits program, has [See **Software**, A12]



SUSAN STERNER Associated Press

ELLIOTT SMITH performs his Oscar-nominated "Miss Misery" at the 1998 Academy Awards. The singer-songwriter died 10 years ago this week in L.A.

His music comforts and saddens still

By AUGUST BROWN

Elliott Smith needed a cigarette. The singer-songwriter was onstage at Largo on Fairfax Avenue not long after smoking had been banned in California bars.

"He'd played about 10 songs and said, 'I'm going to go take a smoke break, does anyone want to join me?'" remembered Largo's long-time owner Mark Flanagan of the 1998 show. "He put his guitar down and walked out to the street. Then 60 people got up and gathered outside. People who didn't even smoke were smoking outside just to be near him."

Smith died 10 years ago this week in his Echo Park home. Those who want to be close to the artist now gather in another public spot — the impromptu Elliott Smith memorial wall just outside the Solutions speaker repair shop on Sunset Boulevard in Silver Lake. Smith was photographed there for his "Figure 8" album cover; these days messages, candles and tiny bottles of Jameson Irish Whiskey (a favorite drink of Smith's) are left there in his memory.

"10/21/13 Elliott, thanks for all you have shared with me, and thousands of others like [See **Smith**, A9]

COLUMN ONE

Monumental oddballs

Lesser-known Washington memorials draw more 'hubs?' than visitors, but they provide a quirky history lesson.

By RICHARD SIMON REPORTING FROM WASHINGTON

Sure, the Lincoln Memorial and Washington Monument are must stops for visitors touring the nation's capital.

But what about Sonny Bono Park? Or the Maine Lobsterman Memorial? Or the Cuban Friendship Urn?

They're all here, as are scores of bronzes, shrines, pillars, plaques and monuments dedicated to the unexpected and the obscure.

The father of homeopathy? He's got a monument. So does James Buchanan, regarded as among the nation's worst presidents.

And don't miss the Bernard Baruch Bench of Inspiration.

"I just came here because no one was sitting here," said Nikolai Paneck, an 18-year-old tourist. He was unaware that he was occupying a bench dedicated in 1960 to honor the

financier and presidential advisor who liked to sit at this spot in Lafayette Park opposite the White House.

These monuments are like a lot of the politicians in this town — in search of recognition. They also illustrate how some topics (like temperance) and people (like inventor John Ericsson) hold and then lose the spotlight. And this being Washington, the success of some commemorative projects shows the ever-present power of influence.

Senators from Maine helped secure a site on the city's waterfront for the lobsterman tribute. A gift from a chapter of Camp Fire Girls, the monument features a 7-foot-tall bronze of a brawny mariner, complete with lobster.

The Cuban Friendship Urn, fashioned from fragments of a hurricane-damaged memorial in Havana to the battleship Maine, was donated to the United States when the countries [See **Monuments**, A13]

California omits quality rankings of health insurers

The state's health insurance exchange is not offering ratings of providers until 2015. Critics say the delay rewards lower-performing insurers and forces consumers to focus on price alone. **BUSINESS**

Weather Cloudy early, then sun. L.A. Basin: 75/56. **AA6**

Complete Index **AA2**

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MARK BOSTER Los Angeles Times

IT'S A GIRL DRAGON!
This Komodo dragon hatchling is the result of a project at the L.A. Zoo to produce more females and close a gender gap. Zoo workers have been using a DNA test to cull eggs by sex. **LATEXTRA**

It was supposed to be bigger than this today

Where am I going to fit in a paddleboard display?

— We've got to upgrade the cameras in the Redondo store —

Gotta follow up on those backorders

Can't believe plastic bantam boards are back

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