

Acoustic Kitty: The Spy That Would Not Follow the Plan

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The CIA explored using an instrumented cat for covert listening. A surviving assessment calls the approach impractical, making this an authentic secret experiment whose popular retelling has acquired uncertain and exaggerated details.

STATUS	Documented experimental program; popular embellishments uncertain
CLASSIFICATION	STR
MATERIAL	United States
DISPOSITION	PUBLIC / SOURCED STORY
CATEGORY	Strange Files
RECORD TYPE	Secrets & conspiracies
STORY HISTORY	1960s

THE ACCOUNT

The proposed listener could stroll past a guard without appearing to be a listener at all. In the 1960s, CIA researchers explored whether a cat could carry electronic equipment and help overhear conversations. The idea married miniaturized technology to an animal whose ordinary presence might attract little concern. What made the cover appealing also made the plan difficult: a cat had its own attention, appetite and destinations.

FOLLOWING THE TRAIL

A declassified CIA memorandum on trained cats concludes that the program did not suit its specialized operational needs. Historical reporting describes the instrumented-animal experiment known as Acoustic Kitty. The surviving assessment supports the project's existence and its impracticality; it should not be stretched to certify every familiar anecdote about its cost or a fatal first mission. Those details are often repeated more confidently than the accessible record allows.

WHY IT STAYS WITH US

The story sounds like satire until the memorandum restores its institutional reality. It is also a limit case for technological optimism: making the equipment small enough does not make the carrier obedient. Its peculiar unease comes from the attempt to convert an everyday creature into a hidden sensor, then encountering the stubborn independence that made the creature seem so inconspicuous in the first place.

WHERE THIS TELLING COMES FROM

CIA memorandum: Views on Trained Cats, declassified records

Central Intelligence Agency records, hosted by The Black Vault

<https://documents.theblackvault.com/documents/cia/acoustickitty-cia.pdf>

That Time the CIA Tried to Train Cats to Be Spies

TIME

<https://time.com/4868642/cia-anniversary-national-security-act-cats/>

RETURN TO THE STORY

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