



Ralph Dergance, Littleton resident and president of the Lockheed Martin Retirement Association, spoke recently to dozens of residents at the Roxborough Area Historical Society's annual meeting.

Those attending were aware that their corporate neighbor plays a role in the nation's aerospace success, but few realized the history behind the giant corporation and its contributions to the nation's aviation,

defense and space programs during the past five decades.

Dergance said that the company traces its beginnings to the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when Glenn L. Martin organized his east coast company around a modest airplane construction business. Through the years Glenn Martin employed men who became icons in the development of the airplane and defense industry: Boeing, Curtiss, Douglas and others.

When the United States was in the midst of the Cold War during the 1950s, the company was called upon to assist in the nation's defense. Martin chose a site---owned by the U.S. government and private ranchers---in southern Jefferson County to initiate the Titan I ICBM program.

It was "out of town and out of view," Dergance said, a perfect setting where a plant could be built behind the hogback and not be seen. The hogback also provided a buffer from the noise of Titan rocket engine tests.

"Titan went from blank paper to flying within three years," Dergance said proudly. Over its 50-year life span, 568 were built, 386 were launched. Titan's multiple phases, from I through IV, made it the most successful defense and space launch vehicle program ever developed. It marked the end of an era when the last one flew out of Vandenberg AFB in 2005.

Pictures taken in 1955 show the first buildings being constructed at the base of the foothills across a rugged terrain. Dergance said that portions of a Butterfield stagecoach road leading into Waterton Canyon can still be seen today. Rattlesnake hunters came from bordering states to clear the terrain so construction could be completed. Among pictures shown by Dergance was one of President Dwight D. Eisenhower viewing the early construction and Titan I ready for testing.

In 1961 Martin merged with American-Marietta to become Martin-Marietta. In 1994, it merged with Lockheed Corporation to become Lockheed-Martin. Another company, United Launch Alliance, was formed by Lockheed-Martin and Boeing in 2006 for the design and manufacture of the Delta and Atlas families of launch vehicles.

Those attending were surprised to learn that hundreds of different systems and products for space, defense, aviation, and communications have come out of the Waterton plant. Employees have engineered, designed, developed, manufactured or participated in such programs as Titan, Atlas launch vehicles, the Gemini, Skylab Space Station, Space Shuttle, Viking Lander, Phoenix, Magellan, Cassini and dozens of others.

Surprisingly, mission control for several programs is conducted on site. The next generation of Global Positioning Satellites will be built there. The contract for the next generation-manned spacecraft, Orion, was awarded to Lockheed-Martin in 2006 and engineers are busy designing the larger Apollo-like vehicle that will replace the Shuttle.

The plant now has 140 separate facilities on 5,000 acres. Lockheed- Martin Space Systems Company, headquartered here, employs over 17,000 people. More than 4,300 are currently working at the Littleton plant in Waterton Canyon. Several former employees attending the meeting swapped stories about working there. One, Chet Foat, had his original badge number, 00003, on his nametag.

Dergance, a 40-year employee of the company Glenn Martin began more than 100 years ago, wears an American flag pin on his sport coat, a symbol of pride in his former company's contributions to the nation's defense and space programs and its commitment to the Littleton/Denver area.

Roxborough Area's Historical Society's next program, *Trails Across the Arkansas/Platte Divide* will be held Thursday March 25. For more information check out the organization's website [www.roxhistory.com](http://www.roxhistory.com).