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IN AMERICA: 1896-1973

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THE CONTROVERSY OVER UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECTS IN AMERICA:

1896 - 1973

A thesis submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Wisconsin in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

BY

David Michael Jacobs

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS . . . . .	ii
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
 Chapter	
I. THE MYSTERY AIRSHIP: PRELIMINARIES TO THE CONTROVERSY . . .	3
II. THE MODERN ERA BEGINS: ATTEMPTS TO REDUCE THE MYSTERY . . .	47
III. THE 1952 WAVE: EFFORTS TO MEET THE CRISIS . . . . .	83
IV. THE ROBERTSON PANEL AND ITS EFFECT ON THE UFO CONTROVERSY .	120
V. CONTACTEES, CLUBS, AND CONFUSION . . . . .	146
VI. 1954 TO 1958: CONTINUED SKIRMISHES AND THE RISE OF NICAP .	181
VII. THE BATTLE FOR CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS . . . . .	216
VIII. 1965: THE TURNING POINT IN THE CONTROVERSY . . . . .	262
IX. THE CONDON COMMITTEE AND ITS AFTERMATH . . . . .	301
CONCLUSION . . . . .	352
A NOTE ON SOURCES . . . . .	357
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	360

## INTRODUCTION

Unidentified flying objects (UFOs) have been a source of continuing controversy. Steeped in ridicule and existing on the fringes of scholarly pursuit, the subject of unidentified flying objects has a history of its own. This involves the Air Force's efforts for over twenty years to cope with the UFO phenomenon, the growth of national organizations dedicated to investigating it, and the scientific community's fear or reluctance to study the subject because of the ridicule attached to it. It also involves press coverage of the subject, motion pictures and television shows about it, and the small group of people who have made a living capitalizing on the fantasy aspects of UFOs. The debate over unidentified flying objects in America was surrounded by emotion, ignorance, and loose thinking. I do not attempt to solve the problem of the origin of the phenomenon. Rather, I try to explain some of the reasons why people expended great amounts of time and energy on it. My focus is on describing and, in part, analyzing societal responses to the appearance of a mysterious phenomenon.

There are semantic difficulties inherent in a discussion of unidentified flying objects. There is no word to describe a person who studies the UFO phenomenon, one who believes that UFOs represent a unique phenomenon, or one who believes that UFOs are products of extraterrestrial intelligence. The lack of precise language prompts people to use the terms "flying saucer" and "unidentified flying object" synonymously.

They are different. The term "flying saucer" conveys the idea of objects intelligently controlled and extraterrestrial in origin. The term "unidentified flying object" denotes just that, an unidentified flying object regardless of speculations about its origin. There also is a difference between a UFO sighting and a UFO report. The first is an event that happens to a person, and the second is the description that the person gives of the event. Moreover, there are two types of UFO reports: those that investigators can explain given sufficient information, and those that investigators cannot explain even with sufficient information. Unhappily, these two types of reports do not have different labels, and the context in this study will have to make the meaning clear. Semantic rigor was not a characteristic of the debate over UFOs.

Finally, a word about the time span of this study. The UFO sighting waves dictated my chronology. The first major sightings took place in 1896 and 1897. I had to leap to 1947 (with a short interlude around World War II) because there were no known large-scale sighting waves between 1897 and 1947. The sighting waves prompted public reaction. Therefore, the history of the debate coincides with the times when people reported unidentified flying objects in American skies.

## CHAPTER I

## THE MYSTERY AIRSHIP: PRELIMINARIES TO THE CONTROVERSY

During 1896 and 1897 many people supposedly witnessed an "airship" which flew over large areas of the United States. The "sightings" started in California in November 1896 and continued until May 1897, with a break from January to the middle of March. People sighted an airship in Arkansas, California, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. Because many of the sightings were simultaneous, there seemed to be more than one object.

The sighted airships appeared most often as dirigible-type machines, cylindrical or cigar-shaped and driven by a motor attached to an air screw or propeller.<sup>1</sup> When people said they saw an "airship," they were differentiating between it and a glider or an heavier-than-air "flying machine." Also, most people distinguished between an "airship" and a "balloon," which was definitely round and had a basket attached to it. They reflected a popular belief that the solution to aerial navigation would be through an airship rather than heavier-than-air flying machines, which had not yet assumed the importance in the popular imagination that they would after 1903. Many of the early designs for the "machine that would conquer the air" looked like dirigibles with a passenger car on the bottom.

It is a fact that thousands of people saw something in the sky; but the descriptions of what they saw varied greatly, either because the witnesses were inaccurate or the objects actually were different. In Omaha, Nebraska, the sighting of an airship interrupted a Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben initiation ceremony: the object was "at least eighteen inches in diameter, the reflection from which passed along what appeared to be a steel body, the length of which could only be estimated at from twelve to thirty feet."<sup>2</sup> In Chicago, on April 10, 1897, the Chicago Tribune reported that people saw an object "about seventy feet in length, of slender proportions, and fragile construction . . . . A few observers claim they also saw, a short distance above the body, lateral structures resembling wings or sails. These appeared to be about twenty feet in width, and, as they were seen from one side, their length could not be accurately estimated."<sup>3</sup> In Mount Carroll, Illinois, witnesses described an airship as being eight to ten feet long and two or three feet high.<sup>4</sup> "A dim outline of it could be seen, which appeared to be shaped like an egg" in Wausau, Wisconsin.<sup>5</sup> An airship over Dallas, Texas, was "in a luminous, hazy cloud" and had "sails or wings outstretched on both sides of its cigar-shaped body"; "on both ends," the report said, "there were large rotating fans projecting from the sails at an angle of about 45 degrees, the one in front being elevated, while the one at the rear was depressed, somewhat resembling the body of a bird." Witnesses estimated its length to be about 200 feet.<sup>6</sup> In Fort Worth, Texas, an airship looked like a sixty-foot long "passenger coach," long and pointed at the ends, with wings "like that of a bat."<sup>7</sup>

Witnesses repeatedly reported lights on the object; this usually was the first indication that an airship was approaching. In Fort

Atkinson, Wisconsin, "the white light . . . ahead and a red light at the rear made the affair look like a machine about fifty feet long and flying about 500 feet above the earth."<sup>8</sup> The Benton Harbor, Michigan, airship had blue, red, and green lights.<sup>9</sup> These variously colored lights, plus an intense red or white "searchlight," were the most common features of the variously reported phenomena. Sometimes the searchlight was so brilliant that, for example, when it appeared in Everest, Kansas, at 9:05 p.m., the "full power of the wonderful lamps were turned on, and the city was flooded with light."<sup>10</sup> Often the unusual color of the white searchlight made it seem phosphorescent. Sometimes the lights came from the side of the ship and moved independently of it. In Milwaukee, Wisconsin, a police officer reported that "the machine, or whatever it was, anchored or stopped directly over the city hall and . . . thousands of people saw it . . . . The lights which appeared on it seemed to move backwards and forwards toward each other, as if signalling to the earth."<sup>11</sup> In Guthrie, Oklahoma, "its outlines were indistinct, but a light was thrown out from the front and at times there were flashes of light from the sides."<sup>12</sup> Frank Dickson, editor of The Progress in Edna, Texas, saw two airships "400 feet apart communicating with each other by means of red and green lights."<sup>13</sup>

The movements of the purported airships ranged from erratic to smooth. In Guthrie, Oklahoma, the object "sank almost to the ground just north of the city, and then rose straight into the air at great speed and disappeared in the darkness of the night."<sup>14</sup> Many times the airship's movements were of a "bouncing" or "undulating" nature which, people speculated, the flapping "wings" caused. For people living in the late

nineteenth century, one of the more surprising aspects of the airship phenomenon was that it could maneuver against the wind; a dispatch from Nashville, Illinois, pointed out that "the fact that the object traveled from the northwest while the wind was from the southwest goes to prove it was not a balloon."<sup>15</sup>

Reported speeds varied greatly, from as slow as five miles per hour to as fast as 200 miles per hour. Once in a while witnesses made more accurate measurements of an airship's speed. A railroad engineer from Burlington, Iowa, for instance, estimated an airship's speed at 150 miles per hour by comparing it to his train's speed.<sup>16</sup> But most people could not make such estimates and simply reported that an airship traveled slowly or "at a terrific rate of speed."

Sometimes people reported noise emanating from a sighted object. In Burlington, Iowa, witnesses heard a "hissing sound,"<sup>17</sup> in Decatur, Michigan, a "sharp, crackling sound,"<sup>18</sup> and in Cameron, Texas, a "humming" noise.<sup>19</sup> In general, though, the objects either made no sound or no one heard them.

There must have been more than one object sighted, both because of simultaneous or almost simultaneous sightings and because of the differences in perceived details. Nevertheless, people found it difficult to accept the idea of many airships. The Chicago Times-Herald reported, for example, that "the 'air ship' has been seen again--that is, in this vicinity. To be sure, it was also seen in Kankakee, Mount Carroll and other places at the same time, but the people in these cities must have been mistaken--or else there is a whole flock of air ships cavorting about through the heavens. The real 'air ship' . . . [is] . . . the one that has been seen

here."<sup>20</sup> Another reporter, trying to explain how witnesses could report an airship in two different places in a short period of time, theorized that it was "speedy" and "covers vast areas of ground."<sup>21</sup> Once in a while an airship would either return to the area or another airship would appear there: a "sensation" ensued in Middleville, Michigan, when citizens sighted an airship flying north at 9:00 p.m. and "another one" flying east at 10:30 p.m.<sup>22</sup>

Often witnesses reported hearing sounds as an airship passed over them at low altitude. Citizens in Sacramento heard voices coming from an airship; others claimed to have heard music, and one man said he heard someone on board say "go up higher, or collide with the church steeples, etc."<sup>23</sup> In Farmerville, Texas, and Galesburg, Michigan, witnesses heard voices but could not understand them.<sup>24</sup> "Sweet strains of music could be heard" in Fontanelle, Iowa, as well as "the workings of its machinery."<sup>25</sup> Observers in Belton, Texas, heard the "passengers'" voices but could not understand them "on account of the velocity" of the craft.<sup>26</sup>

From time to time people said that items, usually letters, dropped from the airships. The Milwaukee Sentinel reported that several letters, fastened to iron rods that were rusted from the rain, purportedly dropped from an airship as it passed overhead: "The suspicion that the letters were 'planted' was not apparently well founded, for no hardware dealers in this vicinity have sold any such rods as the letters were wired to." The letter supposedly stated that the airship "Pegasus," traveling from Tennessee to South Dakota, used steam for propulsion and could carry as much as 1000 pounds; the airship, the note maintained, would "revolutionize all present methods of locomotion." The letter did not disclose the

inventor's identity but asked the "finder" to keep the note until a member of the masonic fraternity called for it.<sup>27</sup> Citizens in Newport, Kentucky, also found a letter describing an airship's traveling speed (forty miles per hour) and other details; "Captain Pegasus" signed the note.<sup>28</sup> In Dupont and Lorain, Ohio, people supposedly found similar notes.<sup>29</sup>

Occasionally witnesses reported seeing occupants on board or near an airship on the ground. In Lovelady, Taxes, one witness saw an object resembling a moving man in the airship's lower part.<sup>30</sup> Several people in Girard, Illinois, who arrived at a landing spot after they had seen an airship rise and "disappear," found footprints which did not "head anywhere and it was evident that they were made by someone who had jumped out of the ship to repair some of the machinery on the outside."<sup>31</sup> In Belle Plaine, Iowa, on April 15, 1897, witnesses of an airship reported seeing "two queer looking persons on board, who made desperate efforts to conceal themselves"; the witnesses said the occupants "had the longest whiskers they ever saw in their lives."<sup>32</sup> Some people in Belton, Texas, "distinctly" saw ten passengers on board an object.<sup>33</sup> Witnesses in Sacramento reported that a cigar-shaped machine "was operated by four men who sat aside the cigar and moved as though they were working their passage on a bicycle."<sup>34</sup> In Cleburne, Texas, a man who claimed that "he had not touched a drop of anything except water during the evening" saw an airship "just above the tops of the houses" with a passenger in it; "as it sped by," he reported, "the passenger gave him the go-ahead sign that brakemen give on the railroad."<sup>35</sup> Once in a while witnesses saw animals as well. The city marshal of Farmerville, Texas, said that when the object passed over him at about 200 feet he could "see two men in the ship and something resembling

a large Newfoundland dog." He also reported hearing the occupants talk, although he could not understand the language, which sounded like Spanish.<sup>36</sup>

Clearly the strangest occurrence in these 1896-1897 sightings was the reported "contacts" between witnesses and airship occupants. These not infrequent reports substantially influenced the thought of the period about what the airships were and who was responsible for them. Sometimes the contact reports were so sketchy that it is difficult to ascertain exactly what happened, if anything did indeed happen. For example, a report from Downs Township, Illinois, simply said that "while [the witness] was at work in a field, an airship alighted near him and . . . six people disembarked therefrom, remained a few minutes and conversed with him, and then jumped aboard, ascended and sailed away."<sup>37</sup> The Harrisburg (Arkansas) Modern News reported that ex-senator Harris (of that state) encountered an airship and occupant who said he had a special "Hotchkiss" gun on board and was thinking of going to Cuba to "kill Spaniards"; he offered Senator Harris a ride which the Senator refused.<sup>38</sup> One of the earliest claims of a detailed contact occurred in California in 1896. The witness told the San Francisco Call that, while searching in the woods for a deer, he had come across six men working on an almost-completed airship who swore him to secrecy; but now that he was sure that this was the airship people had seen, the witness said, he would give a detailed description of the encounter.<sup>39</sup>

In 1897 witnesses reported a whole series of contacts with "people" who were "making repairs" on their airships. Several "presumably truthful" citizens of Chattanooga, Tennessee, said they "came upon the vessel resting on a spur of a mountain near this city. Two men were at work on it and

explained that they had been compelled to return to earth because the machinery was out of order. One of the men said his name was 'Prof. Charles Davidson.' He is alleged to have said that the vessel left Sacramento a month ago and had been sailing all over the country."<sup>40</sup> In Rockland, Texas, John M. Barclay saw something which, as he put it, "made his eyes bulge out." Hearing a whining noise on his farm and the dogs "barking furiously," he went outside with his rifle to investigate; he immediately noticed an airship circling his farm and then saw it land in a pasture next to his house. When he was about 150 feet from the ship, "an ordinary mortal" met him and told him to lay his gun aside because no harm was intended; the occupants wanted lubricating oil, chisels, and a bluestone, for which they paid him. When Barclay tried to inspect the airship, one occupant prevented him from going near it but told him that some day they would return and take him for a ride. The airship, Barclay said, took off "like a shot out of a gun."<sup>41</sup> In Stephenville, Texas, some of the most prominent men in the community--including a judge, state senator, and district attorney--saw an airship which the occupants were repairing. One witness spoke to two of the airship passengers who said their names were S. E. Tilman and A. E. Dolbear; they refused to allow the witness to come near the airship but explained that New York "capitalists" were financing them and that air navigation shortly would be an established fact. Then they boarded the ship and, "bidding adieu to the astonished crowd assembled," sailed away.<sup>42</sup>

Some people who claimed to see occupants reported coming across them and an airship in a secluded place. Judge Love and his friend, Mr. Beatty, were fishing near Waxachie, Texas, when Beatty (while going

upstream for a better fishing spot) discovered a "queer looking machine" in the woods and a group of "five peculiarly dressed men" near it. One of the men who spoke "fairly good English" explained this was one of the famous airships and invited the witnesses to examine it. The man told them that the airship was from "regions in the north pole" since, "contrary to popular belief, there is a large body of land beyond the polar seas." He explained that his people were of the ten lost tribes of Israel and had been living in this inhabitable land for centuries; the people spoke English because Sir Hugh Willoughby's 1553 North Pole Expedition party (which supposedly was lost) and United States raiding parties had been stranded there and taught them the language. They were forced to build airships, the leader said, because they did not have timber for locomotives or sea ships. Now twenty airships were sailing around the United States and Europe, he explained, and all would meet on June 18 and 19 at the Tennessee Centennial Exposition where people could inspect them. Judge Love seemed to believe the occupants: "We then shook hands with the crew and they stepped into their ship, rose in the air and started toward Waco. The description of the ship I have given you is a very meager one, but you can all go to the Nashville Exposition June 18 and 19 and see for yourselves."<sup>43</sup> Similarly, C. G. Williams was walking across a field in Greenville, Texas, when a light suddenly "frightened [him] almost out of [his] senses." An airship, he said, landed near him and three men came out of it, two of whom started to work on the "rigging" of the ship. As Williams began to write down what was happening, the third man interceded: "See here, young man, don't give this thing away. We are experimenting with this vessel . . . . We expect to revolutionize travel and

transportation." The visitor explained that he had been experimenting with flight in a little town in New York state; he and the other two men had intended originally to take a short trip but the flight went so well that they decided to keep going and soon found themselves over Indiana; they were returning home in a few days to make some improvements on the ship. They used electricity to get the airship off the ground and wind power (to turn the large wheel in front of the airship) once in the air, the visitor said. He predicted that in a short while people would hear from him and there would be a "full description of the modern wonder, the airship." The visitor said that if Williams would mail some letters for him, without copying the addresses, in return the visitors would come back and take him on a ride to South America.<sup>44</sup>

Perhaps the most baffling of all contact stories concerned a man named Wilson. The first incident occurred in Beaumont, Texas, on April 19. J. B. Ligon (local agent for the Magnolia Brewery) and his son Charles noticed lights in the Johnson pasture a few hundred yards away and went to investigate. They came upon four men standing beside a large, dark object; one man asked Ligon for two buckets of water. Ligon consented and then questioned one of the men who said his name was Wilson and explained that he and his companions were traveling in a flying machine; they had taken a trip "out on the gulf" and were returning to a "quiet Iowa town" where the airship and four others like it had been made. Wilson explained that electricity powered the propellers and wings.<sup>45</sup> The next day, April 20, Sheriff H. W. Baylor of Uvalde, Texas, went to investigate a strange light and voices in back of his house and encountered an airship and three men. One gave his name as Wilson from Goshen, New

York. Wilson inquired about C. C. Akers, former sheriff of Zavalia County, whom Wilson said he had met in Fort Worth in 1877 and wanted to see again. Sheriff Baylor replied that Captain Akers was at Eagle Pass in the customs service and that he often visited him. Wilson, somewhat disappointed, "asked to be remembered to the captain on the occasion of his next visit." The men from the airship wanted water and requested their visit be kept secret from the townspeople. Then, they boarded the airship and "its great wings and fans were set in motion and it sped away northward in the direction of San Angelo." The county clerk also saw it as it left the area.<sup>46</sup> One week later (on April 27) the Galveston Daily News printed a letter from C. C. Akers who said he had indeed known a man in Fort Worth named Wilson, who was from New York state, educated, and about 24 years old. Akers said Wilson "was of a mechanical turn of mind and was then working on aerial navigation and something that would astonish the world"; Wilson, Akers explained, seemed to have enough money to work on his inventions and, "having succeeded in constructing a practical airship, would probably hunt me up to show me that he was not so wild in his claims as I then supposed." Akers concluded by saying: "I have known Sheriff Baylor many years and know that any statement he may make can be relied on as exactly correct."<sup>47</sup> The next reported incident with a man named Wilson occurred in Kountze, Texas, on April 23. An April 25 article in the Houston Post said that two "responsible men" observed an airship which had descended for repairs; the occupants on board gave their names as Wilson and Jackson.<sup>48</sup>

The Houston Post published an account of an incident which purportedly occurred in Josserand, Texas, on April 22, and which was similar

to the "Wilson incidents," although the name was not mentioned specifically. A whirring sound awakened Frank Nichols, a prominent farmer, who looked out his window to find "brilliant lights streaming from a ponderous vessel of strange proportions" in his cornfield. "With all the bravery of Priam at the siege of Troy," Nichols went outside to investigate; before he could get to the object, two men accosted him and asked for some water from his well: "Thinking he might be entertaining heavenly visitants instead of earthly mortals permission was readily granted." The men invited Nichols to visit the ship, where he talked freely with the crew of six or eight individuals. Although "in his short interview he could gain no knowledge of its [the airship] working," crew members told him that the ship's motive power was "highly condensed electricity." This airship was one of five that they had built in a small town in Iowa with the backing of an immense stock company. The Post article concluded by saying that "Mr. Nichols lives at Josserand, Trinity County, Texas and will convince any credulous [sic] one by showing the place where the ship rested."<sup>49</sup>

The last reported sighting that might involve a man named Wilson--because of its similarities with the other Wilson stories--occurred in Deadwood, Texas. In its April 30 edition, the Houston Post published a letter describing the event. At about 8:30 p.m. H. C. Lagrone heard his horses, which were "old gentle stock, . . . snorting, running and bucking around like a drove of bronchos on a regular stampede"; going out to see what was happening, he saw a bright white light circling around the fields nearby and illuminating the entire area; eventually the light descended and landed in a field. Lagrone thought this was probably the much publicized airship and went to the landing spot; he found a crew of five men,

three of whom entertained him while two others went for water with rubber bags. The men informed him that this ship was one of five which had been flying around the country recently and was the same one that had landed in Beaumont a few days before; these ships were "put up" in an interior town in Illinois. But the men were reluctant to say anything about the inner workings of the ship because "they had not yet secured anything by patent." They did say that they expected to set up a factory in St. Louis and "at once enter into active competition with the railroads for passenger traffic." The crew, Lagrone noted, "was careful not to forget earthly things even though traveling in the heavens. They were well supplied with edibles of all sorts--likewise drinkables; had a good supply of beer and champagne, also had a full supply of musical instruments." Lagrone also reported a curious sidelight to this sighting: the airship passed close to a religious camp meeting and some of the participants who saw the craft "went into paroxysms of alarm" while others thought it was a messenger from God.<sup>50</sup>

Perhaps the most famous occupant incident during the 1896-1897 wave of sightings took place in Leroy, Kansas, on or about April 19. Alexander Hamilton, his son Wall, and his "tenant" Gid awoke to cattle noises; going outside, they discovered--to Hamilton's "utter amazement"--"an airship slowly descending over my cow lot about forty rods from the house." The cigar-shaped object was 300 feet long with a carriage made of "panels of glass or other transparent substance alternating with a narrow strip of some other material"; a large searchlight and smaller red and green lights were attached to it. As it descended to thirty feet above ground and the witnesses came to within fifty yards of it, Hamilton

could see "six of the strangest beings I ever saw" inside. The occupants were "jabbering" but Hamilton could not understand anything. Then the witnesses noticed that a heifer was attached to a red "cable" emanating from the airship and also was caught in a fence. Unable to free the heifer, the witnesses cut the fence and "stood in amazement to see ship, cow and all rise slowly and sail off." The next day a neighbor recovered the calf's hide, legs, and head a few miles away. Hamilton was deeply affected and complained that when he tried to sleep he "would see the cursed thing with its big lights and hideous people." Hamilton concluded his account by saying: "I don't know whether they are devils or angels or what but we all saw them and my whole family saw the ship and I don't want anymore to do with them."<sup>51</sup> The newspaper that carried Hamilton's account also printed an affidavit from eleven prominent community members--such as the postmaster, sheriff, justice of the peace, banker; it said that they had known Hamilton "from 15 to 30 years" and "believe his statement to be true and correct."<sup>52</sup> Eight days later a similar affidavit appeared in the Burlington (Kansas) Daily News.<sup>53</sup>

All these varied reports of occupants agreed on one detail: each described them as ordinary human beings and not as "creatures" from another world. These descriptions played a major role in molding contemporary thought about the airship; the public seemed convinced that, if an airship existed, a secret inventor, perhaps named Wilson, must have made it. This is how the public thought an airship would be developed.

The above reports, from seemingly reliable witnesses, contrast sharply with several apparent hoaxes perpetrated during the period, generally to demonstrate that the entire airship wave was a "lot of nonsense." Excited witnesses usually exposed these hoaxes immediately.

First recorded was the April 5 hoax in Omaha, Nebraska. According to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, two men sent up a balloon with a basket of burning "shavings" attached to it; the wind carried the balloon with burning shavings over the center of the city--hence the solution to the airship mystery.<sup>54</sup> Five days later the Des Moines Leader reported a hoax in Burlington, Iowa: the hoaxers sent a tissue paper balloon up over the city and, as the Leader said, people called the local newspaper office swearing they had seen the airship complete with red and green lights; one reputable citizen swore he heard voices. This convinced the newspaper that "the Nebraska-Iowa-Illinois airship is a pure fake."<sup>55</sup> A more elaborate hoax took place in Waterloo, Iowa, where several men secretly constructed a thirty-six foot canvas and wood airship, complete with "compressors and generators." They guarded it, allowing no one "to inspect the machinery, and any attempt to cross the rope fence . . . was met with an order to stay out." The airship "operators" told the 5000 visitors about how they had come from San Francisco and how they had landed. When the "crew" said that "one man had fallen overboard just before landing," some of the citizens organized a party to search the river for him; then they "discovered that the entire affair was a joke."<sup>56</sup> Hoaxes also occurred in Chicago, Fond du Lac and Portage, Wisconsin, Muncie, Indiana, and Des Moines, Iowa.<sup>57</sup> None of the hoaxes used an airship in flight, since this was virtually impossible.

Enterprising reporters perpetrated many journalistic hoaxes. These generally are not difficult to identify because of their "tongue-in-cheek" tone, with an accent on the sensational. Yet, because so many of the "legitimate" stories were fantastic, some of the journalistic hoaxes

appear equally convincing. The Dallas Morning News printed a literary hoax which supposedly took place in Aurora, Texas, on April 17. "Early risers of Aurora," the writer said, "were astonished" at seeing an airship "traveling due north, and much nearer the earth than ever before." It seemed that the "machinery was out of order" because it was traveling slowly and descending. "It sailed directly over the public square," the article said, and then "collided with the tower of Judge Proctor's windmill and went to pieces with a terrific explosion, scattering debris over several acres of ground, wrecking the windmill and water tank and destroying the judge's flower garden." Although the body of the one occupant was "badly disfigured, enough . . . has been picked up to show that he was not an inhabitant of this world"; in fact, the United States signal service officer, an astronomy expert, said "he was a native of the planet Mars." Moreover, some papers he had "are written in some unknown hieroglyphics, and can not be deciphered." Since the ship was wrecked, the writer explained, it was not possible "to form any conclusion as to its construction or motive power. It was built of an unknown metal, resembling somewhat a mixture of aluminum and silver, and it must have weighed several tons." The last sentence in the article was: "The pilot's funeral will take place at noon tomorrow."<sup>58</sup> This report contains many elements found in other sightings of the period: a ship flying over a town, evidence pointing to Mars as the home of the occupant, the opinion of an "expert," unknown metal. And although the collision itself seems somewhat strange, especially the reference to the flower garden, some of the sincere sightings were just as strange. Nevertheless, a 1966 follow-up investigation seemed to substantiate the hoax theory. There was a Judge

Proctor living in the Aurora area, but "that is the only part of the story that anyone recognized. Two life-long residents of the Aurora area--Miss Mag Morris and Mrs. Lou Inman (88 and 93 respectively)--scoffed at the story."<sup>59</sup> In contrast to this story, other literary hoaxes were much less subtle, the author purposely giving himself away by saying--in the last line--that he was writing from an insane asylum (or something to that effect).

Concurrent with these hoaxes, numerous people around the country claimed to be "the secret inventor" of the airship. The first identified himself during the Sacramento-San Francisco 1896 sightings. The Sacramento Daily Record-Union reported that Mr. Collins, a prominent attorney, claimed that the airship's inventor was one of his clients whom he could not name because of a pledge of secrecy. The client was a wealthy man who had been "studying the subject of flying machines for fifteen years," came to California from Maine to get away from the prying eyes of other inventors, and had spent at least \$100,000 on his invention for which he had applied for a patent. He was keeping his identity secret because he feared that someone might steal his patent if people knew his machine worked. According to the newspaper, the attorney claimed to have seen the machine on the ground and in flight.<sup>60</sup> The next day the Daily Record-Union printed a retraction of Attorney Collins' statement, explaining that the San Francisco Bulletin had tracked down Collins' client, the alleged inventor of the airship, who was only a wealthy dentist. The article reported that Collins denied making any statement about knowing the airship's inventor but did admit that a man had come to him with a patent for an airship and wanted the attorney to represent him in this matter.

Collins' client seems to have had nothing to do with an airship other than making arrangements for patent plans.<sup>61</sup>

Five months afterward, on April 12, 1897, the Chicago Tribune reported that "A. C. Clinton" had written a letter to the directors of the Trans-Mississippi Exposition (to be held in Omaha, Nebraska) claiming to be the inventor of the airship. Clinton said he would prove it in Omaha if the Exposition directors would give him 870,000 square feet of space. "I truly believe I have the greatest invention and discovery ever made," he said.<sup>62</sup> A few days later Clinton A. Case wrote a similar letter to the Omaha newspaper. It soon became obvious that A. C. Clinton and Clinton A. Case were the same person. Case, a violin maker in Omaha, claimed to have discovered the secret of aerial navigation and declared he was the man who had been sailing about the sky recently. Aerial pioneer Henry Maxim saw Case's plan and said it represented nothing new in the field. Case had tried to get capital for his invention before 1896 but no one would invest. There is no evidence that Clinton A. Case ever built an airship and he was not granted the land he requested at the Trans-Mississippi Exposition.<sup>63</sup>

On April 19, 1897, the Louisville Courier-Journal reported that Harry Tibbs claimed to be the inventor of the mysterious airship, which needed only a bit more work before it was ready for flight. Harry Tibbs supposedly was a studious man interested in engineering and had been conducting research on an airship for some time. A while after this report, a friend of Tibbs purportedly received a letter from him saying that the airship was a success: he had made a voyage in it from Cincinnati to Erie, Pennsylvania, and "it works like a charm." Tibbs's description of

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the ship was similar to those many witnesses had made. Tibbs explained that he was keeping his invention a secret because he was afraid someone would copy his idea and beat him to Washington.<sup>64</sup>

Sometimes an enterprising reporter, in an effort to solve the airship mystery, would "find" the inventor and tell the people about him. For instance, an article in the Detroit Free Press said there were indications that John O. Pries of Omaha was the secret inventor, although Pries vigorously denied the story. The reporter's "proof" was that witnesses had seen an airship hover over Pries's house on two different occasions and that Pries had made small models and drawings of airships as a hobby.<sup>65</sup>

In addition to the mystery inventor claims, some people declared that they had taken photographs of an airship. Walter McCann took a widely publicized photograph in Rogers Park (Chicago) while three other men witnessed the event and numerous people said they saw an airship in the vicinity. The Times-Herald printed a pen and ink etching of the photograph and an etcher's "expert" analysis. The etcher, who knew something about photographic analysis, conducted chemical tests to see if anyone had tampered with the print. His results showed this was not the case and he pronounced the photograph to be a good print, "genuine in every particular," and "a mighty fine piece of photographic work at that."<sup>66</sup> But on that same day the Chicago Tribune announced that the supposed photograph of an airship was a fake. An "expert photographer" had examined the photograph and said its perspective was faulty: the picture had a "perspective impossibility" because "no camera could have caught so much within the scope of its lenses." Moreover, the Chicago Tribune noted that a man appeared in the picture who seemed to have his arms outstretched

and a camera in them, as if he was taking the picture of the airship.

"This suggests," the Tribune said, "the thought that perhaps this wonderful Kodak takes pictures of itself and its manipulator as well as of air ships."<sup>67</sup> Yet the picture published in the Times-Herald did not show clearly a camera in the man's hands. There were other reports of photographs<sup>68</sup> but no one verified their authenticity. The Cincinnati Commercial-Tribune, hostile to the idea of an airship, took a fake picture of one to demonstrate that people can be misled and to suggest that everybody who thought he saw the object was "fooled."<sup>69</sup>

The debate over the authenticity of the Rogers Park photograph demonstrates the intense public interest that the airship sightings generated, especially among airship witnesses and people who wanted to see one. Indeed, excitement was so great that reporter after reporter saw fit to describe it. A reporter of the Detroit Free Press said that "the section of Iowa where the ship has been seen is fairly crazy with excitement. People throng the streets of all the towns and villages in hopes of catching a glimpse of it, and the telegraph wires are hot with messages about it."<sup>70</sup> In Dallas, St. Louis, and Chicago the airship was "the sole topic of conversation," as it was in many other cities and towns where it supposedly had been; in fact, some people stayed up all night hoping to get a glimpse of the aerial wonder.<sup>71</sup> After an airship had passed over Kansas City, Missouri, "hundreds of people [were] still on the streets watching intently for a return of the airship."<sup>72</sup> "Expectation ran high" among people in Milwaukee who gathered in the streets when they heard an airship was coming toward their city; any flash of light, such as from "trolley poles of street cars," drew exclamations of

wonder from the knots of citizens clustered in the streets.<sup>73</sup> A St. Louis Post-Dispatch reporter interviewed people arriving by train in Milwaukee from the north and northwest areas of the state and found that "the airship was the one topic of conversation in the region through which they passed."<sup>74</sup> In Chicago the traditional greeting of "hello" was replaced with "Have you seen the airship?"<sup>75</sup>

For people who saw an airship at close range or who had encounters with it, their excitement was mixed with fear and terror. A man in Richmond, Texas, who saw an airship, ran terrified into his house.<sup>76</sup> An airship's appearance in Springfield, Tennessee, caused the witnesses to be "nonplussed" and the black people in the area to be "overcome with abject terror. Many of them shouted and prayed as if they thought the millennium was at hand."<sup>77</sup> In Paris, Texas, a black man fell down on his knees upon seeing an airship and prayed for his and his family's safety; he said the airship was actually "the return of Noah's ark with wing-like attachments on its way toward the Mississippi bottoms, its mission being to save the colored folks from the perils of the overflow in that section."<sup>78</sup> Colonel Peoples of Cameron, Texas, was out in the field with his forty convict-workers when, a newspaper article reported, a "very low" aerial "monster" suddenly appeared over the field. The object seemed in trouble; there was "great commotion" on board the ship and "many apparent signals were given with strange-colored banners or flags. Strange streamers or streaks of peculiar, dazzling white lights seemed to shoot up to the sky from aboard this strange craft." Eventually the object took off and the convicts thought that "evil days had drawn nigh" and their "day of deliverance had come." The article said this "strange" story "was given in good

faith to the News reporter and is vouched for by all the men on Col. Peoples' plantation."<sup>79</sup> In Hillsboro, Texas, a lawyer was driving his horse and buggy when he saw a brilliant flash of white light directly over his buggy; the light "frightened [him] to death." His horse also was frightened and "snorted, reared, and plunged madly, trembling meantime like a leaf."<sup>80</sup>

Airship witnesses were so certain of the reality of their experience that many were vociferous in opposing the prevailing scientific scepticism about the phenomenon. An article in the Chicago Times-Herald said that people who had seen the airship "were ready to debate the matter without fear of being ridiculed, and their opinions were coolly arrived at." In reaction to the theory that the supposed airship was the star Alpha Orionis, R. W. Allen, a pharmacist, said he was "willing to take the consequences of expressing the opinion" that the star theory was wrong. He claimed that he and six other men had observed the object's movements carefully and "no star ever acted in the manner displayed by the lights we saw." The object undulated with the regularity of a "pulse beat"; it had red, green, and white lights on it and flew rapidly toward the northwest."<sup>81</sup> An airship witness in Milwaukee charged that "anyone who claims that the thing I saw floating over the city hall is a star simply don't know what he is talking about."<sup>82</sup>

On the other hand, other witnesses feared public ridicule so much that reporters began to stress the witnesses' reliability and truthfulness: in Belle Plaine, Iowa, a "reputable physician" saw the spectacle;<sup>83</sup> in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin, "reputable citizens" saw the object;<sup>84</sup> in Mount Carroll, Illinois, "persons whose honesty and truthfulness are

beyond dispute" saw an airship;<sup>85</sup> in Denton, Texas, two "credible witnesses saw the object and one witness was a woman "whose reputation for truthfulness can not be assailed."<sup>86</sup> A man who reported sighting an airship over Evanston, Illinois, said he "was afraid of being laughed at and declined to give his name."<sup>87</sup> A Chicago Tribune article about this sighting said that "many reliable people" claimed to have seen the mysterious airship.<sup>88</sup> Witnesses who saw an airship in Omaha were careful to give their full names to the newspapers so that they would seem to be reliable people.<sup>89</sup> In Brenham, Texas, the newspaper took an offensive stance when it published Mr. John R. Pennington's report: the article said people could tell airship stories all day and "the public would scarcely pause to hear them, much less to give the story more than a passing thought, but Mr. John Pennington is a man of unquestionable integrity and not in the habit of talking to hear himself talk."<sup>90</sup>

It was indeed necessary for the public and especially witnesses to be concerned about their reputations in light of what many scientists and other professional people said about the sightings. In 1896 the famed aviation pioneer Octave Chanute, who was working on an airship of his own, said that he did not have the patience to read the full account of the California airship because of its "absurdities." He was certain about the eventual mastery of air travel but did not expect "one fortunate achievement" to solve the complex problem. He was confident that the airship reports would not fool the public.<sup>91</sup> Unknown to Chanute, Attorney Max L. Hosmar, secretary of the Chicago Aeronautical Association, seemed to have the complete explanation for an airship sighted in Chicago: he announced that Chanute invented it and had gone to California to oversee

a test flight from San Francisco to Chicago. The Aeronautical Association planned to give Chanute and his crew a reception when they arrived, but the airship came sooner than expected because "conditions" must have been "extremely favorable."<sup>92</sup> The next day Hosmar had second thoughts about his initial "solution" because it seemed impossible for Chanute to arrive so soon, "scarcely three weeks since the journey was begun." Hosmar revised his statement, saying that Chanute's airship was someplace between San Francisco and the Rocky Mountains.<sup>93</sup> Chanute's airship did not arrive in Chicago; in fact, it never left the ground in San Francisco.

Scientific opinion about the cause of the mysterious light in the sky was divided. Professor Riggs, an astronomer at Creighton College, thought the first airship seen in Omaha was the planet Venus; he did not think it possible that an undetected "fellow in the back woods" could invent an airship when air researchers had been trying unsuccessfully for years.<sup>94</sup> Professor G. W. Hough of the Dearborn Observatory (in Evanston, Illinois) claimed to have watched an airship-like object with a telescope and declared it was the star Alpha Orionis, which people could see with the naked eye usually around 8:00 p.m. The star, at its brightest, "resembles a ball of fire" and the atmosphere made the star's rays change from white to red to green.<sup>95</sup> The next day the Chicago Tribune criticized Professor Hough's theory: it "is open to the suspicion of professional jealousy on the part of a man who does not like other people to see things in his realm that he does not see."<sup>96</sup> Hough immediately issued another statement explaining that the star Alpha Orionis has been "roaming through its regular course in the firmament 10,000,000 years, and why it should have been settled upon in the last three weeks and pointed out as the

headlight of a mysterious aerial vessel is hard to explain."<sup>97</sup> Astronomer Arthur C. Lunn of Lawrence University, who claimed to have observed the phenomenon personally, explained that it was not an airship but the star Betelgeuse in the constellation Orion; he told how atmospheric conditions contributed to the illusion that the object was changing colors and bobbing up and down.<sup>98</sup> Professor G. C. Comstock of the Washburn Observatory at the University of Wisconsin generally agreed; the brightest stars in the sky were Jupiter, Venus, and Sirius, he said, any of which people could mistake for an airship.<sup>99</sup>

Professor Henry S. Pritchett of Washington University (in St. Louis) took a more cautious approach. At first he did not place much stock in the airship stories, he said; but due to corroborative evidence, he now was inclined to treat the matter seriously and believed "something unusual has been seen in the heavens." He joined the Chicago Tribune in criticizing Hough's star theory: Venus was the bright star, not Alpha Orionis, and witnesses had seen the object on cloudy nights. However, Pritchett did not know what the object was. He first thought it was a balloon, he explained, but changed his mind because the object did not have the characteristics of a balloon. He did think it was possible that a secret inventor had developed an airship and said that scientists at Washington University were going to try to solve the problem.<sup>100</sup>

Professor M. S. Koenig, identified only as an electrician from New York, explained that he knew a former workman in one of Edison's laboratories who had discovered a way to overcome the laws of gravity; at last report this person was living in San Francisco and working on an airship. "Of course this sounds remarkable," Koenig said, "but if there is an

airship prowling above the clouds, I firmly believe it is engineered in some such manner."<sup>101</sup> Apparently someone used Koenig's statement to fashion a hoax. Citizens of Astoria, Illinois, discovered some letters supposedly dropped from an airship. One letter was addressed to "Edison" and was signed "C. L. Harris, electrician airship No. 3." Edison used this opportunity to comment on the alleged airship sightings. He declared the letter a "pure fake" and said he had never heard of C. L. Harris. Edison did not doubt that scientists would construct airships in the near future but found it "absurd" to imagine that someone could do so secretly at that time. He suggested that the whole affair was a hoax and the objects were colorful gas-inflated balloons.<sup>102</sup>

Most newspapers agreed with Edison that the airship was a hoax and printed editorials to this effect. The Sacramento Daily Record-Union attributed the sightings to balloons; anyone who thought there were airships was mistaken: "No one went flying through the air on Tuesday night on a machine with a powerful electric light." The editorial did admit, however, that people had seen a light.<sup>103</sup> On the next day the paper carried another editorial that articulated the most common thought about airship witnesses--they were drunk--and placed the airship in the hoax tradition of the sea serpent: "The sea serpent never appeared off the Atlantic coast when there was any dearth of whiskey"; the same was true of the airship which "cannot be verified properly without a liberal use of stimulants."<sup>104</sup> Similarly, the Birmingham (Alabama) News thought that "if the airship business continues, the Prohibitionist party will be driven into calling an extra session to formulate plans for an emergency campaign."<sup>105</sup> An editorial in the Chicago Tribune equated the airship

sightings with the sightings of a sea serpent every year in Lake Michigan.<sup>106</sup> The Kansas City (Missouri) Star declared simply that the airship was Venus and people who thought otherwise had "more imagination than astronomy."<sup>107</sup> The paper charged that San Francisco newspapers had initiated the airship hoax and placed the airship in a long tradition of elaborate hoaxes, including the Kansas meteor and the Prince of Wales's trip to America to see the Fitzsimmons-Corbett fight.<sup>108</sup> Taking an ironic stance, the Chicago Tribune said the "vessel is purely a celestial body which has taken on a few terrestrial attributes in order to accommodate itself to the limitations of human imagination." Some people, the editorial pointed out, even agreed with the "preposterous supposition" that the light is the planet Venus. This could not be true because "a man who knew the facts" said that "Venus does not dodge around, fly swiftly across the horizon, swoop rapidly toward, then soar away until lost in the southern awry [sic]." Ironically, many newspapers used this last statement to support the belief that the airship was not Venus.<sup>109</sup>

Agreeing with the hoax theory, the Des Moines Leader said that airship stories were one of the "most successful fakes in an era of such successes" and a plot that telegraph operators had devised. Operators had kept the airship hoax alive by constantly reporting it in their vicinities, but "when the rest of the public began to take a hand, the airships got too numerous; the reports would conflict, and it was evident that either there was a whole family of the ships or else somebody was manufacturing storues [sic]." The editorial concluded that similar over-worked imaginations had deceived the rest of the country.<sup>110</sup> Madison's Wisconsin State Journal attributed the airship to drunks, apparitions,

optical illusions, wishful thinking, over-zealous newspapermen, and stars. It stated flatly that "there is no airship."<sup>111</sup> To prove the airship a fake, the Cincinnati Commercial-Tribune had a photographer take a fake photograph of an airship to show how such "evidence" could be the product of "trickery."<sup>112</sup> The Baltimore News said dryly: "Last summer it was free silver, now it is airships; what next, nobody knows."<sup>113</sup>

In contrast to the above editorials, the Memphis Commercial Appeal simply stated that "the airship seems to be an accomplished fact."<sup>114</sup> The Dallas Morning News, reluctant to admit that someone had invented an airship, remarked that "nobody need be at all astonished if the airship of fancy should in due course of experiment and invention become an airship in fact."<sup>115</sup> In an article entitled "The Airship Serial," the Galveston Daily News expressed confidence in the future of aerial navigation and in technology's ability to overcome eventually the problems of the air.<sup>116</sup> In a more practical approach, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch believed that the airship would influence frontier taxation and smuggling: "Customs houses would be useless, and the army of officers that now collects customs on imports would have to seek other employment." Also, "Mr. Dingley and his tariff protection would be 'knocked out.'"<sup>117</sup>

As soon as airship stories appeared, creative ways of dealing with them emerged as well in the press. One example is a poem which appeared in the Sacramento Daily Record-Union:

I see'd it! I see'd it!  
 Away up in the air,  
 And the geeses and the duckses  
 Stopped in their flight to stare  
 At the aerphone, or balloon-phone,  
 A sailin' round up there.

I see'd it! I see'd it!  
 'Twas a funny-lookin sight,  
 A sailin' round the stars  
 With its incandescent light--  
 Sashaying first with Jupiter,  
 Then dancin' round the moon,  
 An' bowing to Andromedear--  
 Was the electrified balloon.  
 I see'd it! I see'd it!  
 And a friend of mine will swear  
 That he too see'd the new masheen  
 A flyin' round up there.  
 He's way up in astronomy,  
 An' never tells a lie,  
 An' knows the name of all them things  
 A shinin' in the sky.<sup>118</sup>

Several other newspapers printed similar poems, some of them combining political satire with the airship mystery. One such effort in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch concluded:

That agent of Prosperity  
 That travels in Advance.  
 I says it "was", for now, alas!  
 'Tis fallen in the dust;  
 The bag above it filled with gas,  
 By some mischance did bust;  
 And Hanna and McKinley dig  
 Each other on the sly,  
 And grin while thinking of the big  
 Explosion in the sky.<sup>119</sup>

These poems were early instances of airships entering the "folk process." With its poem, the Dallas Morning News printed a cartoon which pictured an airship, labeled "The Advance-Agent of Prosperity," floating over crowds of farmers; the title of the cartoon was "The Secret of the Airship Disclosed."<sup>120</sup>

There were other cartoons on the subject as well. They ranged from serious attempts to illustrate an airship, to political commentaries, to humorous statements. A cartoon in the Chicago Times-Herald depicted various Chicago nominees running riot in a car suspended beneath two

balloons filled with the hot air of campaign oratory.<sup>121</sup> The St. Louis Post-Dispatch carried two cartoons, one of a drunk person standing near a light pole seeing two cigar-shaped airships in the sky--one marked "Domestic" and the other "Havana"--and the second showing people looking at the object through various types of appliances, including a whiskey bottle, a wine bottle, and a glass.<sup>122</sup>

Although many newspapers and scientists ascribed the airship to hoaxes, hallucinations, alcohol, and the like, some people thought it existed and tried to account for its presence and seemingly inexplicable behavior. The most common theory was that a secret inventor had developed an airship. Another was that extraterrestrial visitation was possible--the most popular source being Mars. Schiaparelli's remarkable discovery in 1877 of "canals" on the Martian surface, the appearance of "seasons" on the planet, and science fiction literature of the day all created a general interest in the possibility of life on Mars. Science fiction writers Jules Verne and H. G. Wells had helped popularize the idea that airships came from Mars. Wells's 1897 story, "The Crystal Egg," told about a Martian television-monitoring device that people had found on earth.<sup>123</sup> Moreover, a commonly held belief at the time was that the Martian landscape was habitable, its air breathable, its costumes conventional, and the inhabitants human-like. The idea of an inhabitable Mars appeared in press and witnesses' accounts too. The St. Louis Post-Dispatch said there was something in the sky well worth scientific attention because "these may be visitors from Mars, fearful, at the last, of invading the planet they have been seeking." The Post-Dispatch suggested sending the Martians "a message of peace and goodwill as well as a hospitable invitation to alight."<sup>124</sup>

After people in Girard, Illinois, saw a machine on the ground, approached it, and watched it rise and fly off, they found footprints in the area; they concluded that "something has happened above the clouds that man has not yet accounted for."<sup>125</sup> People in Texas thought the airship was an exploring party from another planet<sup>126</sup> and the Washington Times conjectured it was a reconnoitering party from Mars. The Memphis Commercial Appeal, also speculating about extraterrestrial visitation, decided that even if "the inhabitants of Mars or some nearer planet have succeeded in overcoming the force of gravitation, it is impossible that human life could be sustained while making the voyage to the earth. It must be the work of man, and of someone who inhabits this earth."<sup>127</sup> Although these extraterrestrial speculations were not widespread because of the more seemingly plausible secret inventor theory, they nevertheless form a link between the 1896-1897 airship mystery and the modern UFO controversy.

Another popular idea was that the airship was an advertising scheme. A reporter in Omaha hypothesized that the airship might be an advertisement for cigarettes; and other people in that city thought that, if not for cigarettes, it was a gimmick for another product.<sup>128</sup> Citizens of Madison, Wisconsin, were convinced that the circus in nearby Baraboo was using the airship as a clever advertising scheme, especially since people in cities to which the circus was coming reported seeing an airship.<sup>129</sup> Actually, one company did capitalize on the airship's publicity: Beck's Stove and Range Company published a humorous drawing of an airship and declared that the whole affair was a publicity stunt. In a semi-serious statement, the company described how it had made the airship and gave a short history of the ship's flights. In conclusion, the

advertisement cautioned: "Don't you believe that any air-ship is genuine unless it bears our Trademark."<sup>130</sup> A related theory, which an Omaha newspaper developed, was that the airship was the second part of a "confidence" scheme. Several years before 1896 a man in Omaha had charged gullible people twenty-five cents to sit in a stadium and see an airship fly. Of course the flight never materialized, but now the hoaxers, the newspaper theorized, had obtained a real airship and came back to give people their money's worth. The airship crew was afraid to land because the bilked people "have always been convinced that it was a confidence scheme, and notwithstanding McKinley's election, confidence has not yet been restored to these people."<sup>131</sup>

Other theories approached similar levels of absurdity. A man in Hempstead, Texas, thought the airship was actually fireflies or "lightning bugs" which could give off very bright lights and seemed to have characteristics in common with the airship: "On dark nights they fly high and are very rapid in their movements, throwing flashlights every few seconds, often at longer intervals."<sup>132</sup> A Washington state man, in a letter to the Sacramento Daily Record-Union, said the solution to the airship mystery was a pelican; he had captured one, tied a Japanese lantern around one of its legs, and turned it loose--hence, the airship sightings.<sup>133</sup> A theory put forth in Atlanta, Texas, suggested that the airship "is the property of a gang of cracksmen [burglars], who by the aid of the searchlight and X-rays, under the management of scientific experts, sail over the towns and look through the walls of the houses and bank vaults and locate the booty; that they return on a later date and secure it, and then disappear by the aid of their airship."<sup>134</sup>

Despite all the observations of the airship phenomenon and both serious and humorous speculation about its nature and origin, the question of what it was remains. Not all of the hundreds of consistent and detailed sightings can be dismissed as hoaxes, illusions, or hallucinations. The most logical and reasonable explanation, in the context of American society in 1896-1897, was the secret inventor theory--that perhaps a powered, controlled flight of an airship actually occurred before present records indicate. Is it possible that not one but many airships, intelligently powered and controlled, were flying through the American skies during this period?

European inventors were far ahead of their American counterparts in developing an airship. Henri Giffard of France built the first navigable (but not practical) one in 1852; it traveled seventeen miles at a speed of five and one-half miles per hour. But it was underpowered and Giffard could not circle or return to the place from which he had started. Frenchmen Albert and Tissandier applied an electric motor to an airship in 1883 and 1884 and enjoyed a slight amount of success in navigating it; yet this machine, too, was underpowered and could not maintain itself against the wind current. In 1884 Charles Renard and A. C. Krebs made a more successful flight in France: their nonrigid dirigible with an electric motor could travel about thirteen miles per hour and return to the point from which it left. The experiment proved that an airship could be practical. However, the power source was still inadequate and the airship could travel only a short distance and carry very little weight. David Schwartz built the first completely rigid dirigible in Germany in 1897. Although the trial flight failed, the machine was an

important development in that it used a gasoline-powered engine. Two other Germans, Wolfert and Baumgarten, built the first dirigible with an internal combustion engine but the ship exploded before its trial flight. Development of the modern dirigible began in France in 1898 with Alberto Santos-Dumont's first airship. Its nonrigid body with two internal combustion engines was controllable. In 1901 Santos-Dumont thrilled France by traveling seven miles in thirty minutes and rounding the Eiffel Tower to return to his starting point.<sup>135</sup>

American airship builders during the 1880s and 1890s were experimenting as well, but few ever completed a machine. In 1884 Arthur DeBausset, a Chicago physician, designed an electrically-powered vacuum tube that was supposed to carry people over great distances at high speeds. He organized a stock company and began soliciting for money, but he failed to obtain the funds and could not build his airship.<sup>136</sup> Six years later Edward J. Pennington of Racine, Wisconsin, organized the Aeronautical Company and built a twenty-four foot model of a projected airship. Pennington's model remarkably resembled the "mystery airship" sighted in 1896 and 1897: it had a cigar-shaped gas bag with wings attached on the sides, a large railroad-like car hanging from the bottom of the bag, and storage batteries to light the car.<sup>137</sup> But Pennington, like DeBausset, could not raise the necessary funds to actually build the ship. His exaggerated claim that the ship could travel at 200 miles per hour prompted press ridicule, especially from the Chicago Tribune, which dampened his fund-raising efforts.<sup>138</sup> In the 1890s American air pioneers Chanute, Lilienthal, Langley, and Pilcher were conducting heavier-than-air experiments. However, these contrivances had no similarities with

witnesses' descriptions of the airship and, as far as historians know, no motor-powered airships flew in America in 1896 or 1897.<sup>139</sup> (A bicycle-powered airship did fly for short distances at the Tennessee Centennial Exposition in May 1897.<sup>140</sup>)

In 1900 A. Leo Stevens built the first motor-driven navigable airship flown in the United States. After this, others experimented with limited success, and in 1904 Thomas Baldwin's four years of experimenting resulted in the flight of the first, practical dirigible in this country: the California Arrow flew in Oakland, California.<sup>141</sup>

In the late 1890s many people in the United States obtained patents for proposed airships. Most people believed someone would invent flight shortly and many wanted to capitalize on the fame and fortune which certainly would come to the first person to launch man into the skies. As soon as someone had a glimmer of an airship design, he applied for a patent. There was much consternation over possible theft or plagiarism of airship designs, for even a patent could not insure that someone might not steal or copy part of a design. As a consequence, most people kept their patents secret. Given this atmosphere and numerous European and American experiments with flight, it is not surprising that the secret inventor stories so captured the public's imagination and seemed such a logical explanation for the mystery airship. To some Americans the possibility did exist that "Wilson" of Texas airship fame was the inventor and pilot of the mystery airship. And, in fact, an independent inventor did invent heavier-than-air flight.

Nonetheless, all evidence indicates that scientific knowledge about powered flight in 1896 and 1897 could not have led to the invention

of airships with the characteristics many witnesses described.<sup>142</sup> And even if an independent inventor had been able to design and fly a successful airship, the problem of secrecy would have been almost insurmountable. An inventor would have found it nearly impossible to spend time and money designing an experimental craft and test flying it without someone discovering his activities. Moreover, in light of the number of different airships reported in many states during 1896 and 1897, a mysterious inventor would not have been able to conceal himself.

The airship phenomenon of 1896-1897 constitutes the first major wave of documented unidentified flying object sightings in America (although not the first sightings per se). Occurring at a time when technology could not duplicate the characteristics witnesses described, the sightings created a national controversy. Although most people expected an airship in the near future, the immediate reaction of those who had not seen the object was hostile; they simply would not believe it was there. Neither the numerous newspaper accounts stressing the reliability and honesty of the witnesses, the descriptions of object characteristics completely unlike any natural phenomena, nor the knowledge that nothing else was in the sky could convince most people to believe an airship existed. In contrast, for the people who had sighted an object, no amount of persuasion or reason could dissuade them from believing it was there.

To explain the enigma, the public then, as did the public later, looked first for "rational" explanations--those that would make sense in terms of the scientific and experiential knowledge of the time. When these were not completely satisfactory, the public turned to more

"irrational" theories. An airship seemed so far out of the realm of current technological knowledge that a gap resulted in people's idea of what "should be" and what "was." If something should not be now but could be in the future, it seems that people--instead of reevaluating the possibilities--completely denied its existence. This attitude toward the "unknown" or "unexplained" is the crucial link between the 1896-1897 phenomenon and the modern unidentified flying object phenomenon beginning in 1947. It also was central to the debate over whether unidentified flying objects constituted a unique phenomenon. Laying low for the first half of the twentieth century, while air technology mushroomed, the phenomenon of strange objects in the sky and furor over it appeared again in 1947 and became a private and public battlefield.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>See Savante Stubilius, Airship, Aeroplane, Aircraft (Goteborg, Sweden: Almqvist Wiksell, 1966), for a complete analysis of nineteenth-century usage of words dealing with aircraft.

<sup>2</sup>Morning World-Herald (Omaha), 6 April 1897, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup>Chicago Tribune, 10 April 1897, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup>Chicago Tribune, 10 April 1897, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup>Chicago Tribune, 10 April 1897, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup>Dallas Morning News, 17 April 1897, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup>Dallas Morning News, 16 April 1897, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup>Sentinel (Milwaukee), 11 April 1897, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup>Free Press (Detroit), 14 April 1897, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup>Free Press (Detroit), 4 April 1897, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup>Chicago Tribune, 12 April 1897, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup>Dallas Morning News, 8 April 1897, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup>Daily News (Galveston), 24 April 1897, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup>Dallas Morning News, 8 April 1897, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup>Times-Herald (Chicago), 6 April 1897, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup>Dallas Morning News, 16 April 1897, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup>Free Press (Detroit), 10 April 1897, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup>Chicago Tribune, 2 April 1897, p. 14.

<sup>19</sup>Dallas Morning News, 19 April 1897, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup>Times-Herald (Chicago), 10 April 1897, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup>Times-Herald (Chicago), 13 April 1897, p. 2.

- <sup>22</sup>Free Press (Detroit), 16 April 1897, p. 3.
- <sup>23</sup>Daily Record-Union (Sacramento), 18 November 1896, p. 4;  
19 November 1896, p. 8.
- <sup>24</sup>Dallas Morning News, 18 April 1897, p. 4; Chicago Tribune,  
2 April 1897, p. 14.
- <sup>25</sup>Leader (Des Moines), 13 April 1897, p. 3.
- <sup>26</sup>Post (Houston), 22 April 1897, p. 9.
- <sup>27</sup>Sentinel (Milwaukee), 15 April 1897, p. 10.
- <sup>28</sup>Commercial-Tribune (Cincinnati), 25 April 1897, p. 10.
- <sup>29</sup>Commercial-Tribune (Cincinnati), 25 April 1897, p. 10.
- <sup>30</sup>Daily News (Galveston), 22 April 1897, p. 4.
- <sup>31</sup>Post-Dispatch (St. Louis), 14 April 1897, p. 7.
- <sup>32</sup>Times-Herald (Chicago), 16 April 1897, p. 1.
- <sup>33</sup>Post (Houston), 22 April 1897, p. 9.
- <sup>34</sup>Daily Record-Union (Sacramento), 19 November 1896, p. 8.
- <sup>35</sup>Dallas Morning News, 18 April 1897, p. 4.
- <sup>36</sup>Dallas Morning News, 18 April 1897, p. 4.
- <sup>37</sup>Times-Herald (Chicago), 17 April 1897, p. 6.
- <sup>38</sup>Modern News (Harrisburg, Arkansas), 23 April 1897, p. 2.
- <sup>39</sup>Daily Record-Union (Sacramento), 24 November 1896, p. 8.
- <sup>40</sup>Post-Dispatch (St. Louis), 25 April 1897, p. 9.
- <sup>41</sup>Post (Houston), 25 April 1897, p. 13.
- <sup>42</sup>Dallas Morning News, 19 April 1897, p. 5.
- <sup>43</sup>Dallas Morning News, 19 April 1897, p. 5.
- <sup>44</sup>Dallas Morning News, 19 April 1897, p. 5.
- <sup>45</sup>Post (Houston), 21 April 1897, p. 2.
- <sup>46</sup>Daily News (Galveston), 24 April 1897, p. 3.

- <sup>47</sup>Daily News (Galveston), 28 April 1897, p. 6.
- <sup>48</sup>Post (Houston), 25 April 1897, p. 5.
- <sup>49</sup>Post (Houston), 26 April 1897, p. 2.
- <sup>50</sup>Post (Houston), 30 April 1897, p. 7.
- <sup>51</sup>Farmer's Advocate (Yates Center, Kansas), 23 April 1897, cited in Jerome Clark, "The Strange Case of the 1897 Airship," Flying Saucer Review, XII (July-August 1966), 10-17.
- <sup>52</sup>Farmer's Advocate, cited in Flying Saucer Review, pp. 10-17.
- <sup>53</sup>Farmer's Advocate, cited in Flying Saucer Review, p. 13.
- <sup>54</sup>Post-Dispatch (St. Louis), 11 April 1897, p. 2.
- <sup>55</sup>Leader (Des Moines), 11 April 1897, p. 3.
- <sup>56</sup>Record (Chicago), 17 April 1897, cited in Donald Hanlon, "The Airship in Fact and Fiction," Flying Saucer Review, XVI (July-August 1970), 20-21.
- <sup>57</sup>Sentinel (Milwaukee), 15 April 1897, p. 1; Commercial-Tribune (Cincinnati), 19 April 1897, p. 1; Daily News (Des Moines), 12 April 1897, p. 3.
- <sup>58</sup>Dallas Morning News, 19 April 1897, p. 5.
- <sup>59</sup>Frank Masquellette, "Physical Evidence of Great Airships of 1897," Post (Houston), 13 June 1966, p. 8.
- <sup>60</sup>Daily Record-Union (Sacramento), 23 November 1896, p. 4.
- <sup>61</sup>Daily Record-Union (Sacramento), 24 November 1896, p. 8.
- <sup>62</sup>Chicago Tribune, 12 April 1897, p. 6.
- <sup>63</sup>Chicago Tribune, 26 April 1897, p. 3.
- <sup>64</sup>Courier-Journal (Louisville), 19 April 1897, p. 1.
- <sup>65</sup>Free Press (Detroit), 1 April 1897, p. 9.
- <sup>66</sup>Times-Herald (Chicago), 12 April 1897, p. 1.
- <sup>67</sup>Chicago Tribune, 12 April 1897, p. 5.
- <sup>68</sup>See Daily News (Des Moines), 12 April 1897, p. 3.
- <sup>69</sup>Commercial-Tribune (Cincinnati), 16 April 1897, p. 1.

- 70 Free Press (Detroit), 10 April 1897, p. 2.
- 71 Dallas Morning News, 18 April 1897, p. 4.
- 72 Globe-Democrat (St. Louis), 2 April 1897, p. 2.
- 73 Sentinel (Milwaukee), 10 April 1897, p. 1.
- 74 Post-Dispatch (St. Louis), 10 April 1897, pp. 1, 2.
- 75 Times-Herald (Chicago), 10 April 1897, p. 4.
- 76 Daily News (Galveston), 20 April 1897, p. 2.
- 77 Courier-Journal (Louisville), 15 April 1897, p. 5.
- 78 Dallas Morning News, 17 April 1897, p. 8.
- 79 Dallas Morning News, 19 April 1897, p. 5.
- 80 Dallas Morning News, 17 April 1897, p. 8.
- 81 Times-Herald (Chicago), 11 April 1897, p. 2.
- 82 Chicago Tribune, 12 April 1897, p. 5.
- 83 Times-Herald (Chicago), 8 April 1897, p. 1.
- 84 Sentinel (Milwaukee), 11 April 1897, p. 11.
- 85 Chicago Tribune, 10 April 1897, p. 2.
- 86 Daily News (Galveston), 15 April 1897, p. 1.
- 87 Times-Herald (Chicago), 4 April 1897, p. 1.
- 88 Chicago Tribune, 5 April 1897, p. 4.
- 89 Morning World-Herald (Omaha), 6 April 1897, p. 5.
- 90 Daily News (Galveston), 23 April 1897, p. 3.
- 91 Daily Record-Union (Sacramento), 24 November 1896, p. 1.
- 92 Chicago Tribune, 10 April 1897, p. 1.
- 93 Chicago Tribune, 11 April 1897, p. 1.
- 94 Morning World-Herald (Omaha), 8 April 1897, p. 5.
- 95 Chicago Tribune, 10 April 1897, p. 2.

- <sup>96</sup>Chicago Tribune, 11 April 1897, p. 32.
- <sup>97</sup>Chicago Tribune, 11 April 1897, p. 1.
- <sup>98</sup>Sentinel (Milwaukee), 13 April 1897, p. 1.
- <sup>99</sup>Sentinel (Milwaukee), 13 April 1897, p. 1.
- <sup>100</sup>Post-Dispatch (St. Louis), 10 April 1897, pp. 1, 2; 13 April 1897, pp. 1, 2.
- <sup>101</sup>Post-Dispatch (St. Louis), 13 April 1897, pp. 1, 2.
- <sup>102</sup>Chicago Tribune, 20 April 1897, p. 4.
- <sup>103</sup>Daily Record-Union (Sacramento), 20 November 1896, p. 2.
- <sup>104</sup>Daily Record-Union (Sacramento), 21 November 1896, p. 4.
- <sup>105</sup>News (Birmingham, Alabama), cited in Commercial-Tribune (Cincinnati), 22 April 1897, p. 4.
- <sup>106</sup>Chicago Tribune, 19 April 1897, p. 6.
- <sup>107</sup>Star (Kansas City, Missouri), 28 March 1897, p. 2.
- <sup>108</sup>Star (Kansas City, Missouri), 29 March 1897, p. 8.
- <sup>109</sup>Chicago Tribune, 4 April 1897, p. 32.
- <sup>110</sup>Leader (Des Moines), 11 April 1897, p. 3.
- <sup>111</sup>Wisconsin State Journal (Madison), 12 April 1897, p. 2.
- <sup>112</sup>Commercial-Tribune (Cincinnati), 16 April 1897, p. 1.
- <sup>113</sup>News (Baltimore), cited in Commercial Tribune (Cincinnati), 22 April 1897, p. 4.
- <sup>114</sup>Commercial Appeal (Memphis), cited in Commercial-Tribune (Cincinnati), 22 April 1897, p. 4.
- <sup>115</sup>Dallas Morning News, 21 April 1897, p. 6.
- <sup>116</sup>Daily News (Galveston), 2 May 1897, p. 20.
- <sup>117</sup>Post-Dispatch (St. Louis), 18 April 1897, p. 20.
- <sup>118</sup>Daily Record-Union (Sacramento), 24 November 1896, p. 8.
- <sup>119</sup>Post-Dispatch (St. Louis), 17 April 1897, p. 1.

- <sup>120</sup>Dallas Morning News, 18 April 1897, p. 4.
- <sup>121</sup>Times-Herald (Chicago), 12 April 1897, p. 1.
- <sup>122</sup>Post-Dispatch (St. Louis), 12 April 1897, pp. 1, 2; 18 April 1897, p. 1.
- <sup>123</sup>James O. Bailey, Pilgrims Through Space and Time (New York: Argus, 1947), p. 96.
- <sup>124</sup>Post-Dispatch (St. Louis), 11 April 1897, p. 4.
- <sup>125</sup>Post-Dispatch (St. Louis), 14 April 1897, p. 7.
- <sup>126</sup>Post (Houston), 22 April 1897, p. 9.
- <sup>127</sup>Times (Washington) and Commercial Appeal (Memphis), cited in Commercial-Tribune (Cincinnati), 22 April 1897, p. 4.
- <sup>128</sup>Globe-Democrat (St. Louis), 13 April 1897, p. 11.
- <sup>129</sup>Sentinel (Milwaukee), 13 April 1897, p. 1.
- <sup>130</sup>Post-Dispatch (St. Louis), 14 April 1897, p. 5.
- <sup>131</sup>Morning World-Herald (Omaha), 8 April 1897, p. 5.
- <sup>132</sup>Daily News (Galveston), 16 April 1897, p. 2.
- <sup>133</sup>Daily Record-Union (Sacramento), 30 November 1896, p. 3.
- <sup>134</sup>Post (Houston), 22 April 1897, p. 9.
- <sup>135</sup>Basil Clarke, The History of Airships (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1960), pp. 31-44. See also Joseph H. Hood, The Story of Airships (London: Arthur Barker Ltd., 1968); John Toland, Ships in the Sky (New York: Henry Holt Co., 1957); Charles H. Gibbs-Smith, The Invention of the Aeroplane, 1799-1901 (New York: Taplinger, 1966); C. Gibbs-Smith, A History of Flying (London: B. T. Batsford, 1953); C. Gibbs-Smith, Aviation: An Historical Survey (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1970).
- <sup>136</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>137</sup>"Pennington's Airship," Scientific American, 7 March 1891, p. 150.
- <sup>138</sup>Howard Scamehorn, Balloons to Jets (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1957), pp. 14-15.
- <sup>139</sup>Scamehorn, p. 15.

<sup>140</sup>For a photograph of Professor Barnard's pedal-powered airship, see Herman Justi, ed., Official History of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition (Nashville: Brandon Printing Co., 1898), p. 404.

<sup>141</sup>Scamehorn, p. 15.

<sup>142</sup>Charles H. Gibbs-Smith, "Historical Note," Flying Saucer Review, XII (July-August 1966), 17.

## CHAPTER II

### THE MODERN ERA BEGINS: ATTEMPTS TO REDUCE THE MYSTERY

The debate over the existence and origin of unidentified flying objects centered on the Air Force's investigation of the phenomenon. Beginning in 1947, the Air Force started to collect and evaluate reports. When it had acquired what it considered to be adequate information, it determined that UFOs represented nothing unusual in the atmosphere. The methodology the Air Force used in arriving at this conclusion was a focal point of the controversy. But even before 1947, when the modern controversy began, the United States twice had been involved with unidentified flying objects, first in World War II and then in postwar Sweden.

The first sightings occurred when Allied bomber pilots reported that strange balls of light and disc-shaped objects followed them as they flew over Germany and Japan. These "foo fighters," as the Allies called them, "danced" off the bombers' wingtips or paced the planes in front and back. At first people thought the objects were static electricity charges; then rumor had it that they were either German or Japanese secret weapons designed to foul the ignition systems of the bombers. Ironically, after the war the American public learned that the Germans and Japanese had encountered the same strange phenomenon and had explained it as Allied secret weapons. The United States Eighth Army investigated the foo fighters, concluding that they were the product of "mass hallucination."<sup>1</sup> No one was overly concerned with them at the time because they

did not appear to be hostile. Their explanation or source, however, remains a mystery.

The second wave of sightings occurred in Western Europe and in Scandinavia, where many people reported seeing strange, cigar-shaped objects in 1946. Witnesses in Sweden and Finland sighted the objects close to the Russian border, making American intelligence agents curious. They feared that these "ghost rockets," as they were called, might be secret weapons that the Russians developed with the help of German scientists and captured designs from the Peenemünde, Germany, secret proving ground. Army intelligence dispatched General James A. Doolittle to investigate the reports in cooperation with the Swedish government. The investigators explained 80 percent of the objects as misidentification of natural phenomena but made no conclusion about the other 20 percent.<sup>2</sup> The explanations for the foo fighters and the ghost rockets foreshadowed future ones that the Air Force, scientists, and the public would give for UFOs in the United States.

While Sweden was experiencing its wave of UFO sightings, the "modern era" of sightings in the United States began. On June 24, 1947, Boise businessman Kenneth Arnold, an experienced mountain and licensed air rescue pilot, was flying his private plane from Chehalis to Yakima, Washington, when he decided to look for a downed plane missing for some days. While searching, Arnold saw nine disc-shaped objects flying in loose formation and making an undulating motion, like, he said, "a saucer skipping over water." Arnold timed the speed of the objects as they passed between two points and calculated them to be traveling over 1700 miles per hour--an unprecedented speed for 1947. He told his story to

the ground crew in Yakima. When he flew on to Pendleton, Washington, he found that his story had preceded him and that sceptical newsmen awaited him. But because Arnold was such a reputable citizen (pilot, businessman, deputy sheriff), scepticism changed to wonder and the journalists reported the incident as a serious news item.<sup>3</sup>

The Arnold sighting was vital for modern UFO history in the United States. As a result of his description of the objects, the newspaper headline writers coined the term "flying saucer,"<sup>4</sup> which allowed the public to place seemingly inexplicable observations in a new category. People looking up in the sky could now report that they saw something identifiable: a "flying saucer." Moreover, the term subtly connoted an artificially-constructed piece of hardware; a "saucer" is not a natural object. Consequently, when a witness said at that time that he saw a "flying saucer" he implied something strange and even other-worldly.

Perhaps the greatest importance of the Arnold story is that it encouraged people all over the country to come forth with their own stories about strange objects in the sky. Many of these sightings occurred before Arnold's. Newspapers printed hundreds of reports. Independent UFO investigator Ted Bloecher studied the 1947 wave of sightings and found that, with 850 reports, it was one of the largest sighting years on record. Some reports went back to January, but the peak did not come until July, one month after the Arnold story broke.<sup>5</sup>

The press went through stages in its attitude toward the 1947 sightings. At first it reported the stories fairly and impartially. But as some of the stories became more fantastic and as newsmen uncovered various hoaxes, they added ridicule to their reports--a ridicule

stimulated by the fact that no one had found a "saucer" or could offer proof that they even existed. Many previously sceptical newsmen began to feel that there really was nothing unusual in the sky in the first place. By the end of July newspaper reporters automatically placed any witness who claimed to see something strange in the sky in the "crackpot" category. Kenneth Arnold became victim to this belated ridicule and stated a few weeks later: "If I saw a ten story building flying through the air I would never say a word about it."<sup>6</sup> An Air Force investigator noted that Arnold was "practically a moron in the eyes of the majority of the population of the United States."<sup>7</sup>

News reporters had some evidence on which to base their scepticism. Along with the authentic 1947 sightings came numerous hoaxes that, as in the 1896-1897 period, added to the confusion. For example, Vernon Baird, a pilot, reported seeing a bunch of "yo-yo's" while flying over Montana. A Los Angeles newspaper printed the story on July 6, 1947, and other newspapers around the country quickly picked it up. Baird later said it was all a joke he had cooked up while shooting the breeze with the boys around the hangar.<sup>8</sup> Other people thought it would be good fun to make saucer-shaped objects and leave them in other people's yards so that they could discover a "downed" saucer. One midwestern newspaper offered \$3,000 to anyone who could prove that flying saucers existed; this prompted many individuals to perpetrate hoaxes to collect the "reward."<sup>9</sup> As in 1896-1897, some people tried to capitalize on the saucer "craze." A publicity agent, for instance, sent his clients pie plates inscribed with their names. Another press agent advertised that a radio show would feature the "Flying Saucer Blues."<sup>10</sup>

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Some people, of course, viewed the situation seriously. The Washington Air National Guard equipped all its pilots with cameras in hopes of getting a picture of a flying saucer. The pilots were not successful and this added to the suspicion that nothing had been in the sky to begin with.<sup>11</sup> Lack of photographic evidence was not the only thing to make people suspicious. Explanations for the reports helped as well. After the Arnold sighting in June, the San Francisco Chronicle published a group of "expert" opinions about the mystery. One United Air Lines pilot thought Arnold had seen the reflection of his instrument panel off his cockpit window. An Oregon meteorologist suggested Arnold had seen strange objects because he had become slightly snowblind. A University of Oregon astronomer said Arnold was the victim of "persistent vision," the result of staring at the sun for long periods of time.<sup>12</sup>

Not all the explanations were serious. The New York Times printed a tongue-in-cheek editorial suggesting that the objects were "atoms escaping from an overwrought bomb," Air Force anti-radar devices, visitors from another planet, or after-images of light on the human eye. Yet another suggestion was that the objects, all being silver, were coins that "high-riding government officials" were scattering to reduce the country's overhead.<sup>13</sup> The New York Times consistently took this humorous stance during the first five years of the controversy. Life magazine followed suit, printing a suggestion from Harvard anthropologist Ernest A. Hooton that saucers were "misplaced halos searching for all the people who were killed over the Fourth of July." The Life article went on to equate the saucer sightings with those of the Loch Ness Monster.<sup>14</sup> As had happened in 1896-1897, many magazine writers insisted on equating flying saucers with the Loch Ness Monster or sea serpents.

Scientists spoke out on the matter. At a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Chicago on December 26, 1947, Dr. C. C. Wylie, an astronomer at the University of Iowa, suggested that the UFOs were an example of "mass hysteria . . . on a national scale." He blamed the sightings on "the present failure of scientific men to explain promptly and accurately flaming objects seen over several states, flying saucers and other celestial phenomena which arouse national interest." This failure, he explained, was causing the public to lose confidence in the "intellectual ability of scholars."<sup>15</sup> Gordon A. Atwater, an astronomer at the Hayden Planetarium, told The New York Times that the first sighting reports were "entirely authentic" but that most subsequent reports were the result of a "mild case of meteorological jitters" combined with "mass hypnosis." Dr. Jan Schilt, Rutherford Professor of Astronomy at Columbia, suggested that a speeding plane had churned up the atmosphere, thereby causing distorted light rays which were responsible for the sightings. Dr. Newborn Smith of the United States Bureau of Standards laughed the whole thing off as another "Loch Ness Monster story."<sup>16</sup> The New York Times also interviewed Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko and air pioneer Orville Wright. In a light-hearted manner Gromyko suggested that the UFOs were discs from Soviet discus-throwers practicing for the Olympic Games. Orville Wright believed that there was no scientific basis for the objects and had a more sinister explanation: "It is more propaganda for war to stir up the people and to excite them to believe a foreign power has designs on this nation." In the same article, the Times quoted Leo Crespi, Princeton psychologist, as saying that the real

problem was whether a "view" of a flying saucer was an illusion with objective reference or whether it was "delusionary in nature."<sup>17</sup>

These early attempts to explain the phenomenon contain nearly all the assumptions the public and the Air Force made throughout the controversy. Almost everyone assumed the objects were real but easily explained--that witnesses had simply misidentified conventional phenomena. An August 1947 Gallup Poll showed that 90 percent of the adult population had heard of "flying saucers" and that most people thought the objects were illusions, hoaxes, secret weapons, or other "explainable phenomena." According to the poll, very few people thought the objects came from space.<sup>18</sup> This poll raised a crucial question: were people able to distinguish between atmospheric and man-made phenomena?

The agency best able to make this differentiation at the time was the Air Force. It took on the task, sending all reports to the Technical Intelligence Division of the Air Materiel Command, at Wright Field in Dayton, Ohio. This division quietly received reports throughout 1947. Because defense was its primary responsibility, it initially was interested in whether the objects might be secret weapons. Intelligence personnel thought it was possible that either the Russians had developed a fantastic secret weapon, the same one the Germans supposedly were working on at the Peenemünde proving ground, or that another branch of the United States military had developed a secret weapon unknown to the Air Materiel Command. The investigators at first did not connect flying saucers with the foo fighters, ghost rockets, or the 1896-1897 airships. Although privately the Air Force was interested in the phenomenon, its public position was that there was nothing unusual to see. On July 4,

1947, an Army-Air Force spokesman said the military had not developed a new secret weapon that might be responsible for the sightings and a preliminary study of UFOs had "not produced enough fact to warrant further investigation." He dismissed the Arnold sightings as not "realistic" enough to deserve more study. In the same announcement, however, the Air Materiel Command said it was, in fact, investigating the matter further (particularly sightings in Texas and the Pacific Northwest) to determine whether the objects were meteorological phenomena. It thought that perhaps they were solar reflections on low-hanging clouds or "large hailstones which might have flattened out and glided a bit."<sup>19</sup>

Because sources for the early years of the Air Force's UFO investigation are scarce, one necessarily has to rely on Edward Ruppelt's The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects for much of the information. As head of the Air Force UFO investigation group from 1951 to 1953, Ruppelt had access to files no longer available. In his book he explained that the Air Materiel Command in 1947 had no formal structure within which to investigate sighting reports and that the staff hesitated to do so on its own--without specific orders. To the people at the Command (AMC), no orders meant the Air Force was not officially interested in the subject. Nonetheless, the staff did collect reports in a haphazard manner, filing newspaper accounts and reports made to other military bases. Finally, AMC received classified orders to investigate all reports it collected.<sup>20</sup> Because the order was classified, and the objects might be Russian weapons, the Air Force insisted that the investigation be secret and tightened security.

Ruppelt said that the Air Force "top brass" wanted to solve the problem quickly. This created a certain amount of pressure and the staff began making frantic attempts to find answers. Two main schools of thought resulted. Some Air Force investigators thought the objects were terrestrial--either Russian secret weapons, atmospheric phenomena, or a secret Navy circular plane called the XF-5-U-1 or the "Flying Flapjack." The Navy had scrapped the circular plane project in 1942, but the Air Force investigators did not eliminate the possibility that perhaps it had started the project again without the Air Force's knowledge. Other Air Force intelligence personnel thought the objects might be extraterrestrial--spaceships or "space animals." Eventually both groups merged to investigate what seemed to be most likely and immediate: the Russian secret weapon theory.<sup>21</sup>

In the meantime public speculation and interest was growing. Many people thought the atomic bomb might in some way have caused the sightings. This prompted David Lillienthal, chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, to publicly state that the UFOs were not a result of the testing program.<sup>22</sup> Then in August an "unidentified Air Force officer" announced that the Air Force had solved the problem: personnel discovered two large disc-shaped flying machines in a Maryland barn; the inventor of the contraptions had disappeared some time after failing to interest the Air Force in helping him develop the planes; these objects probably were the prototypes of the objects seen flying around the country. But this discovery was premature, and the next day an Air Force spokesman denied having found the solution to the mystery.<sup>23</sup>

At the end of 1947, after having officially received 156 reports, the Air Force decided that the problem required a more complete investigation than the one in progress at AMC. On September 23, 1947, Lieutenant General Nathan F. Twining, Commander of the Air Materiel Command, wrote to the Commanding General of the Army-Air Forces saying that "the phenomenon reported is something real and not visionary or fictitious"; the objects appeared to be disc-shaped, as large as aircraft, and controlled "either manually, automatically, or remotely." Twining said it most likely was possible to build an aircraft with similar flight characteristics, but "any developments in this country along the lines indicated would be extremely expensive, time-consuming and at the considerable expense of current projects." Twining thought the military must still consider the possibilities that the objects were of domestic origin, that one might crash and provide positive physical evidence of its existence, and that they might be of foreign origin and "possibly nuclear." But, because the military could only speculate about the objects, Twining recommended that "Headquarters, Army-Air Forces issue a directive assigning a priority, security classification and Code Name for a detailed study of this matter." In the meantime, AMC would continue to collect the data as they came in.<sup>24</sup>

Major General L. C. Craigie accepted this recommendation and issued an order, on December 30, 1947, to establish an Air Force project to study the phenomenon of unidentified flying objects. The project, code name "Sign," would be at Wright Field (now Wright-Patterson Air Force Base) under the auspices of the Technical Intelligence Division of AMC and would carry a 2A "restricted" classification (1A was the highest). Its function

was to "collect, collate, evaluate and distribute to interested government agencies and contractors all information concerning sightings and phenomena in the atmosphere which can be construed to be of concern to the national security."<sup>25</sup> The main purpose was to determine whether the "saucers" were a threat to the national security. Project Sign, known publicly as Project Saucer, began work on January 22, 1948.<sup>26</sup>

Two weeks before Project Sign's establishment, a famous sighting occurred that was to occupy much of the project staff's time and attention for the next year. On January 7, 1948, witnesses in the Louisville, Kentucky, area saw a round, silvery object, about 250 to 300 feet in diameter, moving in a southerly direction. They reported the sighting to the state police who called Godman Air Force Base to ask if anyone there had seen it. The flight controllers went outside and saw the object as it floated overhead. After deciding that it was not a plane or weather balloon, the flight controllers radioed four Air National Guard F-51 planes, which were coming into base, to take a look. One plane was low on fuel and landed, but the other three, with Captain Thomas Mantell in the lead, went up to observe. As Mantell climbed to reach the object, it sped away from him and climbed higher; he had no oxygen equipment in his plane and could not follow. But being obviously excited about the object and reporting that it was "metallic" and "tremendous in size," he decided to climb to 20,000 feet to try to overtake it. As he did this he lost consciousness, his plane went into a dive and disintegrated, and Mantell died.<sup>27</sup>

The Mantell incident resulted in sensational press coverage. The fact that a person had dramatically died in an encounter with an alleged

flying saucer increased public concern about the phenomenon. Now there was the prospect that UFOs were not only extraterrestrial but potentially hostile as well. And as if this was not enough to increase public curiosity, the people at Project Sign explained that Mantell had died while trying to reach the planet Venus, which he had apparently mistaken for a flying saucer.<sup>28</sup> The press and the public were incredulous. This official explanation began an important theme in the UFO controversy: that the Air Force conspired to keep important information from the public. (A few years later, the Navy disclosed that a secret, high altitude, photographic reconnaissance "Skyhook" balloon was in the area and Mantell might have died trying to reach it.<sup>29</sup>)

After the Mantell incident the people at AMC began to work seriously on the problem. They assumed that conscientious observers had sighted real objects and that UFOs were not products of misidentification. According to Ruppelt, Project Sign staff thoroughly investigated every possibility that the objects could be Russian secret weapons of German design; AMC even contacted those German designers in America to see if it were possible for the Russians to have used the designs to develop flying saucers. In every case, the answer was negative.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, AMC reasoned that the outside metal would not hold up under the tremendous heat at the reported speeds and that--if the objects were actually Russian secret weapons--the Russians would be foolish to fly them over hostile territory where they might crash and the Americans could recover them.

The Project Sign staff was left with some unsettling implications. If the objects were real but not Russian or American, and if their flight

characteristics did not match the state of technology at the time, then perhaps they were not "ordinary"; perhaps they were from another planet. One group at Project Sign began to explore the extraterrestrial possibility seriously. Ruppelt found a memorandum in the project files stating that thinking of the objects in "human" terms was unproductive; thinking of them in nonhuman terms might help explain their maneuvering characteristics.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, another group at Sign was not convinced and maintained that the objects were not extraordinary but rather manifestations of psychological quirks, or man-made, or natural atmospheric phenomena mislabeled. But at this time the "extraordinary group" won the day and the Sign investigators focused on the possibility of extraterrestrial origin.

By the time Project Sign began its investigation in 1948, press ridicule of UFO witnesses was intense, and newspapers, losing much of their initial enthusiasm for the subject, printed fewer articles about sightings. Sign personnel worked with maximum privacy and minimum disturbance from February to the beginning of August. But on July 24, 1948, another famous and controversial sighting interrupted their quietude. Captains Clarence S. Chiles and John B. Whitted, flying an Eastern Air Lines DC-3, saw a large light, traveling at a tremendous speed, that seemed to be on a collision course with the plane. As the light-object approached, the pilots saw that it was cigar-shaped, had two rows of windows around it with light coming from them, and a red-orange flame coming out of one end. Chiles and Whitted became alarmed and quickly banked the DC-3 into a tight, left turn. The object streaked past the DC-3 at about 700 miles per hour and then climbed into a cloud bank

when the pilots lost sight of it. The one passenger who was awake at the time said he saw a bright flash of light go by his window but could not provide any details. A pilot flying another plane in the vicinity reported seeing a bright object in the sky at about the same time. Later people on the ground reported witnessing a similar object at about the same time as the DC-3/object encounter.<sup>32</sup>

The Chiles and Whitted sighting was the first time that two obviously competent witnesses and a passenger had seen a UFO at close range. The sighting had a great impact at Sign. The people at AMC now felt it was time to present their findings. They wrote an "Estimate of the Situation," classified "top secret." The Estimate traced the history of UFO sightings, including the ghost rockets and American sightings before 1947; the conclusion was that evidence indicated the UFOs were of extraterrestrial origin.<sup>33</sup> The Project Sign staff sent the "Estimate of the Situation" through channels, all the way to Chief of Staff General Hoyt S. Vandenberg. The General decided that the report lacked "proof" and sent it back to Sign where it died quietly. Ruppelt reported that a few months later the Air Force declassified and burned the report.<sup>34</sup>

According to Ruppelt, the failure of the "Estimate of the Situation" to receive "official blessing" resulted in a policy change at Project Sign. The people who had suggested that the objects were "extraordinary" and perhaps extraterrestrial suddenly lost influence and the people who believed that the objects were "ordinary" gained prestige. A subtle change in "climate" ensued and the proponents of the extraterrestrial hypothesis found themselves championing an unpopular theory. The prevailing opinion at AMC was that UFOs were explainable in conventional terms.<sup>35</sup>

In February 1949 Project Sign issued a report reflecting the philosophies of both groups. It concluded that there was not enough evidence to either prove or disprove an objective existence to flying saucers. On the one hand, positive proof of the existence of UFOs could come only from "hard" data, i.e., the remains of a downed saucer. On the other hand, "proof of non-existence is equally impossible to obtain unless a reasonable and convincing explanation is determined for each incident," and the staff acknowledged it had not been able to do this for 20 percent of the sightings.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, the staff said it did not have enough evidence to conclude that the objects did not represent a security threat to the United States, even though it had no evidence to suggest the objects were Russian weapons. The report went on to say that since the staff arrived at "simple and understandable" causes for some of the objects, "there is the possibility that enough incidents can be solved to eliminate or greatly reduce the mystery associated with these occurrences." The Project Sign staff believed that evaluating UFO reports was a necessary activity for military intelligence agencies: the sightings were "inevitable," and during war "rapid and convincing solutions of such occurrences are necessary to maintain morale of military and civilian personnel." For this reason alone the staff thought that the Air Force should train competent people to handle the problem.<sup>37</sup> The report recommended that the Air Force expend a minimum effort to collect and evaluate the data on flying saucers: "When and if a sufficient number of incidents are solved to indicate that these sightings do not represent a threat to the security of the nation, the assignment of special project status to the activity could be terminated." The Air Force should handle subsequent

investigations of the phenomenon routinely, "like any other intelligence work."<sup>38</sup> The report also recommended improving procedures for obtaining accurate measurements by using photography and radar and by relying more on simultaneous ground and air sightings.

The Project Sign report included an interesting appendix by James E. Lipp, of the Rand Corporation, on the feasibility of the objects being extraterrestrial. Lipp's reasoning was as follows: because Earth is the only evolutionary life-producing planet in our solar system (he had eliminated all others in his study), the objects do not come from another planet in our solar system; assuming that probably one planet in each solar system has an environment conducive to producing evolutionary, intelligent life, and assuming that Earth is "average in advancement and development," then a fifty-fifty chance exists that such forms of life are advanced enough to engage in space travel; therefore, the objects are more likely to come from planets in other solar systems; but, Lipp explained, even if life on other planets had developed space travel, the distance between Earth and those planets and the time necessary to reach Earth probably would prohibit other life from coming here. Besides, Lipp argued, if the extraterrestrials were here they would have contacted us by now. Lipp concluded that it was possible extraterrestrials were visiting Earth but that it was highly improbable. In addition, "the actions attributed to the 'flying objects' reported during 1947 and 1948 seem inconsistent with space travel" as he had formulated it.<sup>39</sup>

Project Sign's recommendations set the tone for the controversy over unidentified flying objects for the next twenty years. In 1949 the "Cold War" was becoming heated and it was natural for Sign to recommend

continued military intelligence control over the investigation of sighting reports. There is no indication that Sign ever envisioned a nonmilitary, systematic study of the phenomenon. The staff believed that even if the alleged objects were nonhostile, and therefore not properly within the jurisdiction of the military, it should still be involved with the subject because of the potential "morale" problem during wartime. Furthermore, apart from the growing ridicule attached to the subject, the military's control of the UFO investigation may have inhibited the scientific community from conducting its own study of UFOs because all "good" data were in Project Sign's classified files. Therefore, military inquiry may have prevented nonmilitary, systematic inquiry--even in the unlikely case that certain scientists would have found an interest in the phenomenon.

After the Project Sign staff issued its report, the Project took on a "new look" based on the ascendancy of the group that believed UFOs did not represent any type of extraordinary object. According to Ruppelt, Air Force officials abruptly terminated the plan to expand Project Sign's investigation by placing UFO teams at every Air Force base. New staff people replaced many of the old personnel, who had leaned toward the extraterrestrial hypothesis.<sup>40</sup> In the future Sign personnel would assume that all UFO reports were misidentifications, hoaxes, or hallucinations. J. Allen Hynek, later scientific consultant for the Air Force's UFO project, said that after the Sign report came out the atmosphere at the UFO office was markedly "chillier" than before.<sup>41</sup>

The new look meant a new name as well. On February 11, 1949, Project Sign officially became Project Grudge which, under the United States Joint Services Code Word Index, referred to "Detailed Study of

Flying Discs."<sup>42</sup> Its purpose was the continued collection and evaluation of UFO data. Grudge retained the 2A security classification and its UFO files were closed to the public. The Project Grudge staff tried to implement Project Sign's recommendations both by explaining every UFO report received and by assuring the public that the Air Force was investigating the UFO phenomenon thoroughly and had found no extraordinary objects in the atmosphere. Instead of seeking the origin of a possibly unique phenomenon, as Sign had done, Grudge usually denied the objective reality of that phenomenon. In this way Grudge shifted the focus of its investigation from the phenomenon to the people who reported it. Grudge also made a concerted effort to alleviate possible public anxiety over UFOs: it embarked on a public relations campaign designed to convince the public that UFOs constituted nothing unusual or extraordinary.<sup>43</sup>

As part of the new focus, the Air Force made its first major public statement on UFOs by giving its "whole-hearted co-operation" to writer Sidney Shallett's two-part article about UFOs for the Saturday Evening Post. The article appeared on April 30 and May 7, 1949. Shallett believed most UFO sightings were balloons, atmospheric phenomena, and ordinary objects. He dismissed pilots' reports as being "strange tricks" that "the sun, stars, and senses can play upon you in the wild blue."<sup>44</sup> Shallett conceded that a few UFO sightings remained unidentified, but most of these were probably the products of "vertigo and self-hypnosis brought about by staring too long at a fixed light."<sup>45</sup> Shallett discussed hoaxes in detail and gave many examples of easily identifiable sightings, some of which Army and Air Force generals had made. He quoted Air Force General Carl Spaatz: "If the American people are capable of

getting so excited over something which doesn't exist . . . God help us if anyone ever plasters us with a real atomic bomb."<sup>46</sup> Shallett also suggested a psychological explanation. Americans, living in a "jittery age," induced in part by an "atomic psychosis" and the possibilities of space travel and planned earth-orbiting satellites, easily saw "Martians and saucers."<sup>47</sup> The first installment of Shallett's article concluded: "if there is a scrap of bona fide evidence to support the notion that our inventive geniuses or any potential enemy, on this or any other planet, is spewing saucers over America, the Air Force has been unable to locate it."<sup>48</sup> The second part ended with a quotation from Dr. Irving Langmuir, a Nobel Prize winner in chemistry, a consultant for Project Sign, and, as Shallett admitted, the most outspoken foe of flying saucers in the United States. Langmuir's final advice to the Air Force on the UFO issue was: "Forget it!"<sup>49</sup>

According to Ruppelt, the Air Force had hoped that this article would stem the tide of reports that had been flowing into AMC. But apparently the article failed; a few days after the second part appeared, UFO sightings hit an all-time high. The Air Force, thinking that the article caused the sightings, tried to counter this "reaction" by issuing a lengthy press release saying that UFOs were nothing but products of mass hysteria and the misidentification of natural phenomena.<sup>50</sup> Ruppelt explained the public reaction to the article in two ways. He said, first, that several people at Project Grudge thought the sightings continued because Shallett had admitted that a few UFOs remained unidentified. According to some of the Grudge staff, this made Shallett pro-saucer. Second, Ruppelt said, the article was too biased; instead of alleviating

the public's doubts, it planted a seed of doubt in the public mind about the Air Force's investigating method. Some people started studying the subject on their own because they could not reconcile Air Force concern six months back with the subsequent lack of concern.<sup>51</sup>

Throughout 1949 the Air Force worked on gathering evidence to prove that UFOs as a unique phenomenon did not exist. With the help of the Project's new scientific consultant, J. Allen Hynek (then professor of astronomy at Ohio State University and head of the McMillan Observatory) whose job was to sift astronomical phenomena from the UFO reports, the Air Force explored every conceivable possibility that witnesses who thought they saw something extraordinary were either lying or mistaken. These findings were, of course, classified. Six months after Project Grudge began this official investigation, it was ready to issue its final report in August 1949. (The Air Force released a summary of the report to the press on December 27, 1949.)

Project Grudge reported on 244 cases that it had investigated. As the Project Sign staff had recommended, Grudge made an effort to explain every sighting even though many of the "explanations" seemed forced or highly speculative. The case of a T-6 training plane pilot illustrates their tactics. The pilot noticed a light near him as he was beginning to land and tried to get closer to see what it was, but the light seemed to take "evasive action." The pilot blinked his navigation lights but got no answer. He flew even closer to the light but it went "up and over" his plane; he tried to get closer again, and again the light turned; he attempted to get between the light and the moon, but the light turned so tightly that he could not do it. This scene went on for ten minutes.

Finally the pilot made a pass at the light and turned on his landing lights. He could see that it was a "dark gray and oval-shaped" object, which finally made a "tight turn and headed for the coast." Four Air Force witnesses who had been watching from the ground completely corroborated the pilot's story. The Air Weather Service, which specializes in weather balloons, investigated and said the object was "definitely not a balloon."<sup>52</sup> Hynek also investigated and said that there was "no astronomical explanation."<sup>53</sup> The object was neither another airplane nor an hallucination. Despite the lack of "evidence," Project Grudge still contended that the object was a weather balloon but did not reveal how it had arrived at this conclusion.<sup>54</sup>

Grudge's final report also included the results of Hynek's investigation of the Mantell case. His conclusions were ambiguous, but Hynek speculated that Mantell had chased Venus. Yet because Venus is only a pin-point in the daylight sky, even at its brightest, Hynek further speculated that if Mantell did not chase Venus he probably chased a balloon or maybe two balloons.<sup>55</sup> Later in a press conference an Air Force major said that Mantell had chased Venus and there was nothing more to the case. (Hynek apologized for this interpretation in 1952, saying that the UFO was not Venus.<sup>56</sup>) Hynek and the Air Force had no knowledge of the Navy's secret Skyhook balloon in the area, which Mantell may well have chased.

Even though the Grudge staff (working primarily with Hynek) did everything it could to explain all the sightings, 23 percent remained unidentified. For these, Grudge looked to psychology. The final report stated: "There are sufficient psychological explanations for the reports

of unidentified flying objects to provide plausible explanations for reports not otherwise explainable."<sup>57</sup> The Rand Corporation, which had a contract with the Air Force to study reports of sizes and shapes of UFOs, found nothing in the reports "which would seriously controvert simple rational explanations of the various phenomena in terms of balloons, conventional aircraft, planets, meteors, bits of paper, optical illusions, practical jokes, psychopathological reporters and the like."<sup>58</sup> Project Grudge concluded that "there is no evidence that objects reported upon are the result of an advanced scientific foreign development; and therefore, they constitute no direct threat to the national security." It also concluded that "all evidence and analysis indicated that UFOs were the result of the misinterpretation of various conventional objects," or "a mild form of mass hysteria and war nerves," or hoaxes that publicity seekers and "psychopathological persons" perpetrated. Grudge recommended, therefore, that the "investigation and study of reports of unidentified flying objects be reduced in scope." AMC should collect only those reports "in which realistic technical applications are clearly indicated." A note attached said that it was apparent that "further study along present lines would only confirm the findings presented herein."<sup>59</sup>

Project Grudge, still unsure of public reaction, believed that reported sightings could be dangerous: "There are indications that the planned release of sufficient unusual aerial objects coupled with the release of related psychological propaganda would cause a form of mild hysteria. Employment of these methods by or against an enemy would yield similar results." Therefore, "governmental agencies interested in psychological warfare should be informed of the results of this study."

Moreover, Grudge recommended that its conclusions be made public, "in the form of an official press release," to dispel "public apprehension."<sup>60</sup>

The importance of public relations in the UFO controversy is evident in the staff's recommendation that the Project be reduced in scope. The Grudge staff thought that the very existence of an organized Air Force investigatory body might encourage people to believe that there was something extraordinary in the skies. With this in mind, the Air Force issued a press release on December 27, 1949, announcing the termination of Project Grudge.<sup>61</sup> The Air Force wanted to disengage itself from the controversy. It transferred Project Grudge personnel elsewhere and stored all records. While this was going on, however, the Air Force Intelligence Director, in a directive to the Project Grudge staff, announced that the Project was not really disbanded and that the order to do so was premature. The Director explained that the Air Force would continue to collect UFO reports but handle them through normal intelligence channels rather than by a special project.<sup>62</sup> From the beginning of 1950 until the middle of 1951 Project Grudge remained in this state of "suspended animation." Once again, as with the Project Sign report, Grudge's recommendations discouraged independent inquiry. Grudge, in spite of its conclusion that UFOs were not hostile, continued the near military monopoly over sightings. Even though the Air Force was no longer officially interested in the problem, Grudge refused to declassify its data or even recommend that a nonmilitary group study the problem further.

Project Grudge personnel had anticipated a large amount of publicity about the report. But press reaction was subdued and mainly limited to noticing that the Air Force had issued the report. Why the

expected publicity did not materialize is a matter of conjecture. Ruppelt's speculation was that the report, being so ambiguous and such an obvious attempt to "explain" every sighting, served to hinder news reporters from believing it or writing about it as the final explanation for the sightings.<sup>63</sup> Whatever the reason, the Project Grudge report did not receive much publicity whereas articles about the UFO phenomenon steadily increased in number. Although most people, according to a 1950 Gallup Poll, believed that UFOs represented secret weapons, hoaxes, misidentification, and the like, a growing number thought that UFOs might be "something from another planet."<sup>64</sup> This interest, continued widespread reports of sightings, and the possibility that there was money in the UFO business all helped increase the number of newspaper and magazine articles.

True Magazine, in late 1949, commissioned Donald E. Keyhoe, a retired Marine Corps major, to write an independently-researched article on flying saucers. Keyhoe had many friends in the upper echelons of the military and went to them for information. He received none, perhaps because Grudge wanted to play down the entire UFO affair and put a stop to reports. In fact, he alleged that every military person he contacted gave him the "silent treatment."<sup>65</sup> Keyhoe sensed a big story. He interpreted the silence to mean official tight security which, in turn, meant that the Air Force was hiding something important. There was only one thing that could be this important: the flying saucers came from outer space. Keyhoe's article, entitled "The Flying Saucers are Real," appeared in the January 1950 issue of True. He concluded that: "living, intelligent observers from another planet" had been scrutinizing Earth

for 175 years; the intensity of the visits had increased during the past two years; there were three basic types of space ships; and the manner in which the extraterrestrials observed Earth "varies in no important particular from well-developed American plans for the exploration of space expected to come to fruition within the next fifty years."<sup>66</sup> Keyhoe reviewed various sightings, including the Mantell and Chiles and Whitted cases, and discussed the opinions of several "unnamed authorities" on the origin of the saucers. He refrained from attacking the Air Force because he did not know the reasons for the "cover-up." But he speculated that the Air Force was "cover-up" to prevent a "panic" (as in the Orson Welles's 1938 War of the Worlds broadcast) and to prepare the public for the startling disclosure that the saucers were from another planet.<sup>67</sup> Keyhoe used his imagination liberally in the article. When he could not see a clear reason for Air Force policy or actions, he surmised the reason and stated it as fact. Scholarship and reliable information were not strong points of the article. It was, nevertheless, a sensation and Keyhoe became the leading private UFO "authority" in the country. This issue of True was the most widely sold and read in the magazine's history. Indeed, it was one of the most widely read and discussed articles in publishing history. Air Force efforts to assure the public that the article did not reflect the facts accurately were futile.<sup>68</sup>

True followed Keyhoe's article with another sensational "flying-saucers-are-real" story in March. Navy Commander R. B. McLaughlin, a member of a team of scientists at the White Sands (New Mexico) secret guided missile development grounds, explained "How Scientists Tracked the Flying Saucers." The Navy cleared McLaughlin's article. Yet he seemed

to contradict the Project Grudge findings. He discussed how, in the process of launching and tracking a Skyhook balloon, "scientists" (whose specialties he did not name) caught sight of a strange, silvery object near the balloon. One scientist had a theodolite (a surveyor's instrument for measuring horizontal and vertical angles), another a stop watch, and the third a clipboard. They began to record as much information as they could as soon as they saw the object. Before it sped away from view, they were able to ascertain that it was forty feet long, one hundred feet wide, and traveling at an altitude of approximately fifty-six miles and a speed of 25,200 miles per hour. McLaughlin was convinced that the object "was a flying saucer, and further, that these discs are spaceships from another planet."<sup>69</sup> The Keyhoe and McLaughlin articles were the first in a national magazine to present a case for extraterrestrial explanations for UFOs and to contradict official Air Force findings. The articles set the stage for a battle that was to rage for the next twenty years.

Still one more element was to enter that battle arena--Frank Scully's book, Behind the Flying Saucers, published in 1950. Scully was a former Variety columnist who had previously written such momentous works as Fun in Bed, More Fun in Bed, and Junior Fun in Bed. But Scully presented his book on UFOs as a serious work. In it he related the content of a lecture he had heard at the University of Denver. The lecturer was Silas Newton, described as being a millionaire Texas oil man. In the lecture Newton recounted the experiences of his friend and scientist, "Dr. Gee." The doctor had told Newton that the Air Force captured three landed saucers and found sixteen, four-foot high, dead occupants in them. The Air Force took the occupants for examination to "scientists," one of

whom was Dr. Gee. Scully described the occupants and the material composition of the craft. He explained that the water the spacemen drank was "twice as heavy" as earthly water, the men had no cavities in their teeth, and the space ship's metal was much harder than anything known on earth. Neither Newton nor "Dr. Gee" knew why the Air Force kept this a secret, but Newton theorized that it was to avoid "panic."<sup>70</sup> In the remainder of the book, Scully talked about some of the famous sightings, Einstein's special theory of relativity, and newspaper articles on UFOs. The "Dr. Gee" story, of course, was a hoax. However, Newton did give the lecture at the University of Denver and it seemed that Scully actually believed the story. The police arrested Newton and Mr. GeBauer (the mysterious "Dr. Gee") two years later on a charge of fraud. They had bought a worthless piece of war surplus equipment for \$4.50 and were trying to sell it as a sure-fire device for detecting potential oil wells. The price? A mere \$800,000.<sup>71</sup>

In spite of the book's content, it still had a large impact and became a best seller. It was the first American book on UFOs, and Time, Saturday Review, Science Digest, and many other magazines carried reviews of it.<sup>72</sup> But perhaps it was most important as a forerunner of the special breed of saucer cultists and fanatics--the "contactees"--who were to emerge a few years later. Scully's book also added to the already great public confusion. The Air Force had discounted all extraterrestrial theories and had tried to find natural explanations. Keyhoe had contended that UFOs came from outer space, and that the Air Force knew about them. Then Scully said that not only did the Air Force know about them but had actually captured some. The public immediately linked Scully to Keyhoe.

This basic confusion between legitimate UFO theory (that the objects might be extraterrestrial) and the Scully brand of hoax was to plague UFO investigators from this time on.

Keyhoe, meantime, was busily expanding his article for a book with the same title, The Flying Saucers Are Real. In addition to the information in the article, the book contained some new ideas on the reasons for Air Force secrecy. Keyhoe's book, like his article, was based on conjecture, personal opinions from unnamed scientists, some factual information, and a large amount of loose thinking. Because the Project Grudge files were secret, Keyhoe had no way of knowing what was really happening and was forced to rely on people's opinions, official press releases, and the little information he could get out of his friends in the military. For example, Keyhoe used the following conversation as a legitimate method of gaining information:

'Charley, there's a rumor that airline pilots have been ordered not to talk,' I told Planck. 'You know anything about it?'

'You mean ordered by the Air Force or the companies?'

'The Air Force and the C.A.A.'

'If the C.A.A.'s in on it, it's a top level deal,'  
said Charley.

Keyhoe's "facts" seemed similar to Scully's "facts" and many critics failed to see any difference at all.

Because Keyhoe tried to get information but could not, he became more concerned with the "secrecy" aspect than with explanations for UFOs. Keyhoe concluded that the Air Force was "badly worried" when witnesses first reported UFOs in 1947. The Air Force knew "the truth" about Mantell's death, he said, and had established its investigatory agencies to "conceal the truth" about UFOs from the public. The Air Force changed

this policy in the spring of 1949 and "decided to let facts gradually leak out, to prepare the American public." This, explained Keyhoe, was why the Project Sign report included a section on the feasibility of extraterrestrial visitations and why the Air Force had accepted his True article as part of its "public education program." But the Air Force misinterpreted the unexpected public reaction to the article as evidence of "hysteria" and began to deny the existence of saucers.<sup>74</sup> Keyhoe's Air Force secrecy "angle" later provided him with the basis for three more books and the impetus for establishing a large, national UFO organization.

Other people also were beginning to speculate about the correct explanation for the flying saucer phenomenon. Time magazine announced in February 1950 that UFOs were actually Skyhook balloons,<sup>75</sup> a theory widely accepted for a time.<sup>76</sup> On February 26, 1950, Dr. Anthony Marachi, an Air Force chemist, argued that the Skyhook theory led people to a false sense of security because, in actuality, a foreign power launched the saucers. Marachi recommended that the United States identify the foreign power before Americans experienced another Pearl Harbor.<sup>77</sup> David Lawrence's U.S. News and World Report featured an article in April 1950 that purported to solve the flying saucer mystery once and for all. The article said that flying saucers were "real" and that "top Air Force officials know where the saucers originate and are not concerned about them." The reason for this lack of concern was that the saucers were actually Navy secret weapons, the old "Flying Flapjack" XF-5-U-1 that Project Sign had investigated and found abandoned in 1942.<sup>78</sup> This article appeared at the same time that commentator Henry J. Taylor made a similar statement on a national radio broadcast. Although the Air

Force denied the story, the old secret weapon theory revived for a short time. Newsweek printed this story under the heading "Delusions"<sup>79</sup> and by May 1950 UFO reports hit an all-time peak and came into AMC at the rate of about seventeen a month.<sup>80</sup>

The Air Force still tried to downplay the entire UFO phenomenon. Newsmen even asked President Truman about UFOs, and he seriously denied ever having seen one. White House Press Secretary Charles G. Ross, in April 1950, said that the Air Force's final report on the subject "was so conclusive" that the project closed down. When The New York Times asked Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson about the flying saucers, the question, as the Times put it, "brought grins from the man who ought to know." Later a Defense Department press officer said that the Air Force had no intention of reopening Project Saucer.<sup>81</sup>

In January 1951 the Air Force for the second time cooperated with someone writing an article on UFOs. Columnist Bob Considine, in Cosmopolitan magazine, made the most vicious attack to date on "believers." Project Grudge personnel allowed Considine to see certain classified documents in the Pentagon and at AMC and to interview Air Force officers. In "The Disgraceful Flying Saucer Hoax," Considine characterized people who saw flying saucers as "true believers," "gagsters," "screwballs," members of the "lunatic fringe," and victims of "dementia," "cold war jitters," "mass hypnotism," "hallucinations," and "mirages." The whole UFO issue was "purely idiotic," and saucers "wholly nonexistent." Considine interviewed Air Force Colonel Harold E. Watson, who said that the entire, sad affair was simply "nonsense." Not only that, added Considine, but it cost "the taxpayers a tremendous amount of money--for nothing."<sup>82</sup>

(One of the private citizens mentioned in the article sued Considine for libel. In 1954 a judge ruled in favor of Considine. Although the judge admitted that the article was libelous, he believed the part directly related to the plaintiff could not be construed as such.<sup>83</sup>)

By the summer of 1951, Project Grudge had so drastically reduced its staff that only one person, a lieutenant, served as investigator. The large number of sightings in 1950 gave way to a substantial decrease in 1951. In June of that year, for the first time since June 1947, no one reported a sighting to AMC.<sup>84</sup> It appeared that the Air Force, after eighteen months of effort, had finally succeeded in its campaign to eliminate UFO reports and reduce the "mystery" surrounding the phenomenon.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Gordon I. Lore and Richard Deneault, Mysteries of the Skies (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp. 116, 123-125; David R. Saunders and R. Roger Harkins, UFOs? Yes! (New York: Signet, 1968), p. 53; Star (Washington), 6 July 1947, rpt. in Donald E. Keyhoe, The Flying Saucers Are Real (New York: Fawcett, 1950), pp. 34-35.

<sup>2</sup>Herbert Strentz, "An Analysis of Press Coverage of Unidentified Flying Objects, 1947-1966" (Diss. Northwestern University, 1970), p. 145; Saunders and Harkins, p. 54.

<sup>3</sup>Kenneth Arnold's testimony and sighting information are in the sighting files of the Air Force Archives at Maxwell Air Force Base, Montgomery, Alabama; I will hereafter refer to it as MAFB.

<sup>4</sup>Strentz, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup>Ted Bloecher, Report on the UFO Wave of 1947 (Author: 1967), pp. I-1, I-2.

<sup>6</sup>Bloecher, p. I-11.

<sup>7</sup>Frank M. Brown, Memorandum for the Officer in Charge, 16 July 1947 (MAFB).

<sup>8</sup>Bloecher, p. I-14.

<sup>9</sup>New York Times, 9 July 1947, pp. 1, 10.

<sup>10</sup>New York Times, 12 July 1947, p. 11.

<sup>11</sup>Bloecher, p. I-11.

<sup>12</sup>Bloecher, p. I-5.

<sup>13</sup>New York Times, 6 July 1947, Sec. 4, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup>"A Rash of Flying Discs Breaks Out Over the U.S.," Life, 21 July 1947, pp. 14-16.

<sup>15</sup>New York Times, 27 December 1947, p. 28.

<sup>16</sup>New York Times, 6 July 1947, p. 36.

<sup>17</sup>New York Times, 10 July 1947, p. 23.

<sup>18</sup>George H. Gallup, The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1948 (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 666.

<sup>19</sup>New York Times, 4 July 1947, p. 26.

<sup>20</sup>Edward J. Ruppelt, The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1956), p. 23.

<sup>21</sup>Ruppelt, Report on UFOs, p. 22.

<sup>22</sup>New York Times, 7 July 1947, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup>New York Times, 20 August 1947, p. 26.

<sup>24</sup>General Nathan F. Twining to Commander, Air Materiel Command, 23 September 1947, contained in Edward U. Condon, project director, Scientific Study of Unidentified Flying Objects (New York: Bantam ed., 1969), pp. 894-895, hereafter referred to as Condon Report.

<sup>25</sup>Major General L. C. Craigie to Commanding General Wright Field, "Flying Discs," 30 December 1947, contained in Condon Report, pp. 896-897.

<sup>26</sup>Edward J. Ruppelt, "What The Air Force Has Found Out About Flying Saucers," True (May 1954), rpt. in The TRUE Report on Flying Saucers (rpt. from articles in True Magazine; New York: Fawcett, 1967), pp. 36-39, 57-74.

<sup>27</sup>Chiles and Whitted sighting information is on file at MAFB. The information contained in Ruppelt, Report on UFOs, p. 40, relating to a "light left turn" by Chiles and "turbulent air" by the object is incorrect.

<sup>28</sup>Ruppelt, Report on UFOs, p. 33.

<sup>29</sup>Ruppelt, Report on UFOs, pp. 37-38.

<sup>30</sup>Ruppelt, Report on UFOs, pp. 27-28.

<sup>31</sup>Ruppelt, Report on UFOs, p. 28.

<sup>32</sup>Ruppelt, Report on UFOs, p. 41.

<sup>33</sup>Ruppelt, Report on UFOs, p. 41. J. Allen Hynek, the Air Force's scientific consultant on UFOs, has confirmed the existence of the "Estimate of the Situation" in an interview with the author, February 1971.

<sup>34</sup>Ruppelt, Report on UFOs, p. 45.

<sup>35</sup>Ruppelt, Report on UFOs, pp. 58-59.

<sup>36</sup>United States Air Force, "Unidentified Aerial Objects: Project 'Sign'," February 1949, No. F-TR-2274-IA, p. vii (MAFB).

<sup>37</sup>"Project 'Sign'," p. vi.

<sup>38</sup>"Project 'Sign'," p. vi.

<sup>39</sup>"Project 'Sign'," pp. 32-35.

<sup>40</sup>Ruppelt, Report on UFOs, pp. 57, 59-60.

<sup>41</sup>Interview with J. Allen Hynek, February 1971.

<sup>42</sup>United States Air Force, "Unidentified Flying Objects: Project 'Grudge'," 1 August 1949, No. 102-AC 49/15-100, p. 2 (MAFB).

<sup>43</sup>Ruppelt, Report on UFOs, pp. 60-61.

<sup>44</sup>Sidney Shallett, "What You Can Believe About Flying Saucers (Part II)," Saturday Evening Post, 7 May 1949, p. 36.

<sup>45</sup>Shallett, Part II, p. 184.

<sup>46</sup>Shallett, Part II, p. 36.

<sup>47</sup>Shallett, Part II, pp. 185-186.

<sup>48</sup>Sidney Shallett, "What You Can Believe About Flying Saucers (Part I)," Saturday Evening Post, 30 April 1949, p. 20.

<sup>49</sup>Shallett, Part II, p. 186.

<sup>50</sup>"Project 'Grudge'," p. 1; Ruppelt, Report on UFOs, p. 63.

<sup>51</sup>Ruppelt, Report on UFOs, p. 63.

<sup>52</sup>"Project 'Grudge'," incident No. 207, Appendix C-2, p. 4. This incident is discussed in Ruppelt, Report on UFOs, pp. 67-68.

<sup>53</sup>"Project 'Grudge'," incident No. 207, Appendix B, n.p.

<sup>54</sup>"Project 'Grudge'," incident No. 207, Appendix I, n.p.

<sup>55</sup>"Project 'Grudge'," incident No. 33 a-g, Appendix B, n.p.; see also Ruppelt, Report on UFOs, p. 34.

<sup>56</sup>Ruppelt, Report on UFOs, p. 35.

<sup>57</sup>"Project 'Grudge'," Part V, Appendix G, n.p.

<sup>58</sup>A. M. Wood to Lieutenant Colonel A. J. Hemstreet, 29 March 1949, contained in "Project 'Grudge'," Appendix D-I, n.p.

<sup>59</sup>"Project 'Grudge'," p. 10.

<sup>60</sup>"Project 'Grudge'," p. 10.

<sup>61</sup>Department of Defense, News Release No. 629-49, "Air Force Discontinues Flying Saucer Project," 27 December 1949, contained in Leon Davidson, ed., Flying Saucers: An Analysis of the Air Force Project Blue Book Special Report No. 14 (Clarksburg, W. Va.: Saucerian Publications, 1970), p. 7.

<sup>62</sup>Major Boggs, Memorandum for the Record, 31 August 1949 (MAFB).

<sup>63</sup>Ruppelt, Report on UFOs, p. 67.

<sup>64</sup>George H. Gallup, 2 (1949-1958), p. 911.

<sup>65</sup>Keyhoe cited in Ruppelt, Report on UFOs, pp. 64-65.

<sup>66</sup>Donald E. Keyhoe, "The Flying Saucers Are Real," True (January 1950), rpt. in The TRUE Report on Flying Saucers, p. 93.

<sup>67</sup>Keyhoe, True, p. 7.

<sup>68</sup>Ruppelt, Report on UFOs, pp. 64-65.

<sup>69</sup>Robert B. McLaughlin, "How Scientists Tracked a Flying Saucer," True (March 1950), p. 28.

<sup>70</sup>Frank Scully, Behind The Flying Saucers (New York: Henry Holt, 1950), p. 137.

<sup>71</sup>Roland Gelatt, "Flying Saucer Hoax," Saturday Review of Literature, 6 December 1952, p. 31.

<sup>72</sup>Roland Gelatt, "In a Saucer From Venus," Saturday Review of Literature, 23 September 1950, pp. 20-21, 36; "More About Flying Saucers," Science News Letter, 16 September 1950, p. 181; "Visitors From Venus; Flying Saucer Yarn," Time, 9 January 1950, p. 49.

<sup>73</sup>Keyhoe, The Flying Saucers Are Real, p. 73.

<sup>74</sup>Keyhoe, The Flying Saucers Are Real, p. 173.

<sup>75</sup>"Belated Explanation on Flying Saucers," Time, 26 February 1951, p. 22.

<sup>76</sup>New York Times, 14 February 1951, p. 28.

<sup>77</sup>New York Times, 26 February 1951, p. 25.

<sup>78</sup>"Flying Saucers--The Real Story: U.S. Built First One in 1943," U.S. News and World Report, 7 April 1950, pp. 13-15.

<sup>79</sup>"Flying Saucers Again," Newsweek, 17 April 1950, p. 29.

<sup>80</sup>Ruppelt, Report on UFOs, p. 82; Condon Report, p. 515.

<sup>81</sup>New York Times, 5 April 1950, p. 24.

<sup>82</sup>Bob Considine, "The Disgraceful Flying Saucer Hoax," Cosmo-politan (January 1951), pp. 33, 100-102.

<sup>83</sup>Saunders and Harkins, pp. 98-99.

<sup>84</sup>Ruppelt, True, p. 58.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE 1952 WAVE: EFFORTS TO MEET THE CRISIS

In 1952, after a "dormant period" of nearly two years, the Air Force again found itself plagued with the unidentified flying object mystery. The Air Technical Intelligence Center (ATIC), formerly the Intelligence Division of the Air Materiel Command, received the most sighting reports ever recorded--1501 for the year. Several were concurrent radar and visual reports from Air Force pilots and radar personnel. In an attempt to meet the challenge, ATIC authorized the reorganization of Project Grudge, and eventually the Air Force gave it a more prestigious position in the official hierarchy. Under the leadership of Captain Edward Ruppelt, the project staff designed and instituted plans to systematically study the UFO phenomenon. It sought the assistance of engineers, physicists, and astronomers, among others, implemented new and more efficient reporting procedures, contracted for a computer-based study of reported UFO characteristics, made plans to study object maneuver patterns, and developed special radar and photographic detection methods. This upsurge in activity resulted in renewed press and public interest in the phenomenon and a concomitant change in Air Force press policy. The year 1952 marked the high point of the Air Force's UFO investigation and the beginning of styles of thought that dominated the Air Force's attitude toward UFOs until 1969.

A UFO sighting on September 10, 1951, stimulated the Air Force to reorganize Project Grudge. A T-33 pilot and his passenger, an Air Force major, saw what appeared to be an unidentified flying object over the Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, area. The witnesses described an object thirty to fifty feet in diameter, round, silver, nonreflecting, and flat, which hovered below the plane. The pilot dived in an attempt to intercept it, but the object appeared to take evasive action: it hovered for a short time, "flew" south, made a 120-degree turn, and continued on its way out to sea. At this same time a radar operator at the Army Signal Corps radar center (Fort Monmouth) was demonstrating radar equipment to a group of visiting Air Force officers. He picked up a fast moving object above the center and tracked it at speeds from 400 to 700 miles per hour; but the object was so erratic and fast that the operator lost it. The next day Fort Monmouth radar once again picked up unidentified flying objects with the same maneuver patterns. This time, however, the objects disappeared and returned several times and moved so fast that the radar operators could not track them automatically.<sup>1</sup>

The sightings caused a sensation at Fort Monmouth. An Air Force major and a group of officers had witnessed either the objects or their radar returns. The astonished radar operators wrote a letter to ATIC requesting an investigation. The Director of Air Force Intelligence, Major General C. B. Cabell, saw a copy of the letter and requested more information about the Air Force's UFO program. He dispatched Lieutenant Jerry Cummings (head of Project Grudge) and his superior, Lieutenant Colonel N. R. Rosengarten (Chief of the Aircraft and Missiles Branch of ATIC) to Fort Monmouth to investigate.

Cummings and Rosengarten completed the investigation and then briefed General Cabell and his staff on the general status of the UFO program. Cummings related the history of the Air Force program, its shortcomings, and its current status; he explained that reputable persons reported UFO sightings to Project Grudge at a steady rate. Apparently convinced of the legitimacy of the problem, and with no publicity or fanfare, General Cabell ordered ATIC to launch a new UFO project.<sup>2</sup> Since the Air Force had just released Cummings from active duty, Rosengarten appointed Captain Edward Ruppelt, a decorated World War II bombardier, to head the project.

Ruppelt, just reactivated from the reserves because of the Korean conflict and assigned to ATIC as an intelligence officer, had a layman's interest in the subject and had familiarized himself with Grudge before his appointment. Moreover, he had a reputation as a good organizer.<sup>3</sup> In late September 1951 he set to work. First he read all the old Grudge and Sign records. Then he filed and cross-indexed every Sign and Grudge UFO report according to an object's color, size, location, and time of sighting. The cross-indexing helped his staff determine general characteristics of the reports and compile statistical data. Although the Air Force gave Ruppelt some clerical aid, the process was slow.<sup>4</sup>

Being familiar with the factionalism that had permeated previous UFO projects, Ruppelt resolved to avoid such conflicts if possible. He made clear that open speculation or argument about the origins of unidentified flying objects or the legitimacy of the reports was taboo and even ousted several staff members who pushed one theory or another.<sup>5</sup> Ruppelt was determined to reserve judgment until his staff processed all

available information. As part of his reorganization, Ruppelt ordered a classified report each month on current, specific investigations and on the overall status of the project.<sup>6</sup> Finally, he appointed Dr. J. Allen Hynek, already an Air Force consultant in astronomy, as chief scientific consultant to Project Grudge and placed him on Air Force contract. Moreover, Ruppelt actively sought the cooperation of other interested scientists in return for briefings on the UFO situation.

One of Ruppelt's first problems was obtaining "fresh" reports. There was no routine way of quickly gathering UFO reports. Even reports from Air Force servicemen came in haphazardly and sometimes after a delay of up to two months. Consequently, the investigators found it difficult to obtain information that was "fresh" in the minds of witnesses.<sup>7</sup> In addition to the delay factor, Project Grudge met with serious ridicule. In an informal survey of Air Force pilots, Grudge found them reluctant to report UFOs because of possible ridicule from the press and their fellow pilots and officers as well. One pilot summed up the attitude well: "If a space ship flew wing-tip to wing-tip formation with me, I would not report it."<sup>8</sup> The Project Grudge staff worried that if an unconventional vehicle "possessing extraordinary performance and characteristics" appeared, "its detection would be hampered by the reluctance to report sightings."<sup>9</sup>

To overcome delay and ridicule, Ruppelt sought a compulsory method of reporting UFOs quickly and routinely. First he requested a revision of the existing Air Force directive to speed up the reporting process.<sup>10</sup> Then he and his staff intensively briefed Air Force officers to acquaint them with the UFO situation and to show that the Air Force now treated

UFO reports seriously.<sup>11</sup> Ruppelt also recognized the need for a standardized questionnaire for UFO reports, hoping it would alleviate the imprecision and random quality that had characterized previous reports; the Air Force agreed to contract with Ohio State University to develop such a form.<sup>12</sup> In addition, finding that newspapers carried many sighting reports not sent to ATIC, Ruppelt subscribed to a clipping service.<sup>13</sup>

One of Ruppelt's most ambitious projects in late 1951 was to obtain a computer-based study of the reported UFO characteristics. Although he did not expect such an analysis to reveal the origin of the UFO phenomenon, he did believe it would yield valuable data and the Air Force contracted the study to the Battelle Memorial Institute, a private research organization.<sup>14</sup> Ruppelt's final project in 1951 was based on a suggestion from General Cabell. He thought electronic means of UFO detection might be valuable and suggested that radar used in conjunction with photographic equipment could help detect any objects. Project Grudge immediately sought to implement this idea.<sup>15</sup>

Although Project Grudge made progress and seemed to enjoy Air Force "favor," it lacked sufficient funds to do its work well. The Air Force gave Ruppelt a few people to help with investigations and some clerical staff for the office, but thorough investigation of more than a few monthly reports was still impossible. Even when a staff member, usually Ruppelt, made a field investigation, lack of money frequently prevented him from following up all leads. Investigators often had to pay for their own transportation to and from an investigation site when military transportation was not available. Similarly, the Air Force would not give Ruppelt money for a UFO and related materials library;

to help out, Hynek volunteered to buy the books with money from his own Air Force contract.<sup>16</sup> The monetary difficulties indicated the remaining low priority of Project Grudge.

Six months after Ruppelt began his reorganization of Grudge, the Air Force decided that it deserved more support. Ruppelt's briefing policy, his basic organizing procedures, and an increase in the number of sightings during the first three months of 1952 prompted the Air Force to "promote" Grudge from a project within a group to a separate organization. The Air Force changed the code name to Project Blue Book and gave it the formal title of the Aerial Phenomena Group.<sup>17</sup> Normally a change of this nature would mean a change in leadership as well, because an officer with the rank of Colonel or higher usually headed a group. Ruppelt, however, had been so effective that the Blue Book division chief, Colonel Donald Bower, decided to retain him as project director.

Ruppelt also received new help: ATIC's Electronics Group, Analysis Group, Radar Section, and Investigating Group now worked directly under Project Blue Book, and the scientists at Battelle Memorial Institute and Ohio State University could help Ruppelt directly.<sup>18</sup> Around this time Joseph Kaplan, a University of California at Los Angeles physicist and a member of the Air Force Scientific Advisory Board, visited the new project at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio. He had come up with a good idea. Realizing that accurate measurements of any UFO were essential but difficult to obtain, Kaplan suggested an analysis of the color spectrum of an object by use of a special diffraction grid placed over the lens of a camera. When an unidentified flying object came into view, the camera photograph would put the spectrum on film

and the staff could compare the object's spectrum with those of known objects (such as meteors and stars) to determine whether the object was "unknown."<sup>19</sup> ATIC and Blue Book were enthusiastic about this plan, and for the remainder of 1952 Kaplan and Air Force scientists tested possible diffraction grids and cameras for suitability under all conditions.<sup>20</sup> With Kaplan's plan in the development stage, Ruppelt decided to act on General Cabell's radarscope suggestion. He contacted the Air Defense Command, which had about thirty radarscope cameras around the country, and specially briefed its top officers as well as the Joint Air Force Defense Board; they agreed to work out plans for Blue Book to use the cameras.<sup>21</sup> Ruppelt also briefed the "Beacon Hill Group"--scientists who were Air Force Technical Advisors. They suggested that special sound equipment, left unattended in areas of high UFO activity, might be a useful and inexpensive detecting device.<sup>22</sup> Also, the Pentagon, wanting to be informed of Blue Book's activities, assigned Major Dewey Fournet as Pentagon liaison man. Fournet was a party to all major developments, investigations, projects, and theories that came out of Blue Book during 1952.<sup>23</sup>

As well as giving Ruppelt and Project Blue Book more authority, the Air Force implemented Ruppelt's proposed change in UFO reporting methods. On April 5 it issued Air Force Letter 200-5 (published on April 29) directing the Intelligence Officer on every Air Force base in the world to telegram preliminary sighting reports to ATIC immediately and then to write a more detailed report and mail it to ATIC. A copy of these reports also went to the Pentagon. Furthermore, the new directive allowed the Blue Book staff to contact directly any Air Force base or

unit without going through the normal chain of command.<sup>24</sup> This new reporting method resulted in ATIC receiving reports quickly and gave Blue Book more control than it ever had before: the Intelligence Officers had to report all sightings, and Blue Book staff members could decide, on the basis of preliminary information, which reports to investigate immediately.

Two days before issuing Air Force Letter 200-5, the Air Force publicly announced that it was still studying UFOs and would continue as long as some sighting reports remained unexplained. It also alerted all Air Force field commands to report UFOs. The press release warned, however, that the public should not interpret this action as meaning the Air Force had come to any conclusion about the subject.<sup>25</sup> ATIC and the Pentagon also decided to cooperate with the press, replacing their "no comment" with the policy of explaining as much as possible to the public.

Even before Project Grudge became Project Blue Book, the press had shown a renewed interest because of the number of sightings reported. The press' first test of the official cooperation policy came in the early part of March 1952. Robert Ginna, a writer for Life magazine, visited ATIC to gather material for a feature article on UFOs, which he was writing with H. B. Darrach. They had already been to the Pentagon, where they received as much help as they needed. The Blue Book officers were especially cooperative, declassifying sighting reports at Ginna's request. Blue Book wanted to arrange with Life to send it copies of all the UFO reports Life received from its reporters around the world.<sup>26</sup>

Life published the Ginna and Darrach article in its April 7 issue. "Have We Visitors From Space?" was one of the most influential articles ever printed on UFOs, rivaling even the original Keyhoe True article.

Ginna and Darrach explained that the Air Force was using radar, jet interceptors, and photographic equipment in its study, and that it had no reason to believe that flying saucers were hostile or "weapons" of a foreign power. Blue Book, they said, was actively soliciting sighting reports from scientists, pilots, weather observers, and private citizens. The authors noted that discs, cylinders, and similar objects of geometrical form, luminous quality, and solid nature had been and might then be present in the earth's atmosphere. "These objects," the authors stated, "cannot be explained by present science as natural phenomena--but solely as artificial devices created and operated by a high intelligence." No power on earth, they argued, could technologically duplicate the performance of the objects.<sup>27</sup>

The article aired in some detail ten reports never before published, some of which ATIC declassified for the authors. Ginna and Darrach concluded that psychological aberrations, secret weapons, Russian weapons, Skyhook balloons, or atomic test results did not explain adequately these ten sightings. To support their conclusions, they went to Dr. Walther Reidel, former Chief Designer and Research Director of Rockets and Missiles at Peenemünde, Germany, who now worked for an aircraft company in California. Reidel said that Earth material would burn up from the friction that the reported objects' maneuvers created and that human pilots could not withstand the centrifugal force. He interpreted the lack of jets or jet trails to mean that the objects' power source was unknown to humans. "I am completely convinced," he said, "that they have an out-of-world basis." Ginna and Darrach also included remarks from Dr. Maurice A. Boit, a prominent aerodynamicist and mathematical physicist.

Boit believed that the circular design, while being impractical for Earth atmosphere, had significant advantages for space flight. "The least improbable explanation is that these things are artificial and controlled . . . . My opinion for some time has been that they have an extraterrestrial origin." Ginna and Darrach concluded by posing several questions: Where do they come from? Why are they here? What are their intentions? Are they benign? "Before these awesome questions, science--and mankind--can yet only halt in wonder. Answers may come in a generation--or tomorrow. Somewhere in the dark skies there may be those who know."<sup>28</sup>

Reaction to the article was widespread. For the first time a national magazine of Life's stature had come close to advocating the extraterrestrial hypothesis. From April 3 to April 6 over 350 newspapers across the country mentioned the article. ATIC received 110 letters concerning the article, most of them about UFOs sighted over the past two years and theories of the objects' origin, propulsion, and the like. Life itself received over 700 letters.<sup>29</sup> When the press questioned the validity of the Life article, the Air Force did not, as in the past, issue a blanket denial. Instead, it stated that "the article is factual, but Life's conclusions are their own."<sup>30</sup>

The New York Times, which had maintained a consistently hostile attitude toward the extraterrestrial hypothesis, printed a rebuttal to the Life article. Times science writer Walter Kaempffert's main complaint was that Ginna and Darrach were "uncritical." He attacked the validity of some of the reports by citing inconsistencies and argued that most of the sighted objects were balloons, since they dated from the time of the old Skyhook balloon project. Using information from the Grudge report,

Kaempffert said the Air Force had accounted for 99 percent of all sightings and lacked sufficient information on the other 1 percent. He claimed that the UFO had as much reality as the Loch Ness monster.<sup>31</sup> In a similar vein, a Times editorial suggested that the Grudge report should have put an end to all this nonsense once and for all. But, "the idea was too fantastic to die. After all, the sea serpent was with us for decades and it took several years before the Loch Ness monster was buried."<sup>32</sup>

Blue Book braced itself for a flood of reports as a result of the Life article, assuming that its sensational nature would prompt people to see things in the sky. But the flood never materialized: the day after the magazine appeared, ATIC received nine reports; the next day the reports returned to the normal two or three.<sup>33</sup> Yet the number of monthly reports did increase considerably--from the normal ten to twenty reports in previous months to ninety in April and then to seventy-nine in May.<sup>34</sup> One consequence of this increase and of the Life article was a surge of press inquiries to Blue Book, so much so that Ruppelt and his staff felt the inquiries interfered with regular duties. The Air Force appointed a civilian, Albert M. Chop, to handle all press relations through the Air Force's Office of Public Information in the Pentagon. Chop received his information from the Pentagon liaison officer, Major Dewey Fournet.<sup>35</sup> A second result of rising activity in Blue Book was that Thomas K. Finletter, Secretary of the Air Force, personally requested a briefing on UFOs. Afterward, Finletter issued a press statement saying that "no concrete evidence has yet reached us either to prove or disprove the existence of the so-called flying saucers. There remain, however, a number of sightings that the Air Force investigators have been unable to explain. As long as this is true, the Air Force will continue to study flying saucer reports."<sup>36</sup>

By June 1952 Project Blue Book was a dynamic, ongoing organization. Ruppelt's briefing policy had made the UFO problem visible to many Air Force and military groups. The diffraction grid plan, the radarscope plan, the new reporting directive, the Battelle Institute study, the Ohio State questionnaire project, and the monthly status reports all enhanced the prestige of Blue Book and indicated that the Air Force was working intensely and seriously on the UFO mystery.

In June ATIC officially received 149 reports--more than in any other month in history.<sup>37</sup> The reports came from nearly every section of the country. The Blue Book staff had all it could do to simply screen, classify, and file them; Ruppelt discontinued the monthly status reports so that the staff could deal with all the sightings, and the Air Force tried to meet the growing number of reports by increasing Ruppelt's staff to four officers, two airmen, and two secretaries.<sup>38</sup> But the staff still was able to investigate only a fraction of the cases and, in deciding whether a case warranted field investigation, had to rely more and more on the judgment of the base officer who sent in the reports.<sup>39</sup>

Air Force Intelligence officers in the Pentagon became concerned about the increase in reports and called Ruppelt to Washington to give a special briefing to the Director of Intelligence, General Samford, members of his staff, intelligence officers from the Navy, and people Ruppelt claimed he could not name (possibly CIA members). At the briefing some intelligence officers told Ruppelt that they were seriously considering the possibility that the UFOs were extraterrestrial. They directed him to obtain more positive information of scientific value.<sup>40</sup> Ruppelt hoped that the diffraction camera plan would fill this need and continued work on it with a new sense of urgency.

With the upsurge in sighting reports, Harvard astronomer Donald H. Menzel wrote articles for Look and Time expressing his opinions on UFOs.<sup>41</sup> "The key to the whole problem of saucers," he said, was in mirages, reflections, ice crystals floating in clouds, refraction, and temperature inversion (the condition whereby a layer of cold air is sandwiched between layers of warm air); in fact, temperature inversion could account for nearly all nighttime visual and radar sightings. To prove his point, Menzel conducted an experiment: he filled half a glass cylinder with benzene and floated a layer of acetone on the top; the benzene acted as a layer of cold air and the acetone as a layer of warm air; the fluids simulated temperature inversion. He then shot a beam of light through the cylinder, and the light curved down as the layers of solution bent it; he agitated the cylinder and the light seemed to move. Thus he accounted for the source of a "saucer" and its movements. The temperature inversion theory was most appropriate, he said, for desert sightings where "saucer reports are more frequent" and to explain radar returns of UFOs. Menzel concluded: "I believe that these saucers will eventually vanish--most appropriately, into thin air, the region that gave birth to them."<sup>42</sup> He felt sad because saucers were a "frightening diversion in a jittery world." Menzel thought he was acting as a "debunker," and described himself as the man "who shot Santa Claus."<sup>43</sup>

In July Look followed its Menzel article with one by J. Robert Moskin who, like Darrach and Ginna, had been to ATIC and had received full cooperation from the Blue Book staff.<sup>44</sup> Moskin quoted Air Force Chief of Staff, General Hoyt Vandenberg, as saying that the Air Force would continue to study the phenomenon as long as there were unexplained

sightings; Vandenberg warned that "with the present world unrest, we cannot afford to be complacent."<sup>45</sup> Moskin described Blue Book's radar and diffraction grid plans, the sound equipment idea, and alluded to the Battelle study. Although personnel at key atomic installations around the country had sighted UFOs, he noted, there was no evidence that the saucers were spying on or threatening the atomic programs. "But," he hinted darkly, "this fear still lies deeply in some responsible minds."<sup>46</sup> Moskin made an important point in his article. He told how Intelligence men had attempted to correlate sightings with societal events, such as war tensions, atomic tests, and publicity about flying saucers. "They offer no pattern," he concluded, "no explanation that satisfies the experts. And long ago the Air Force gave up the easy idea that all the excitement is just the result of mass hysteria." Moskin stated that the Air Force felt sure the solution to the problem was either: misinterpretation or conventional objects, optical phenomena (as Menzel described), man-made objects, or extraterrestrial objects. Even though Ruppelt said there was no direct indication the objects were a threat to the national security, Moskin concluded, "that doesn't mean they are not a potential threat."<sup>47</sup>

In July ATIC received over 500 reports, more than three times that received in June. The reports came in steadily from all over the country and peaked on July 28 when ATIC received nearly fifty reports in that day.<sup>48</sup> The situation assumed near-panic proportions. The Blue Book staff thought the country was in the midst of a full-scale flying saucer "scare," mainly as a result of the Time, Life, and Look articles. However, the staff could find no evidence to substantiate this idea; in fact, it found that

the number of reported sightings was about the same before the articles appeared as afterward, on a daily basis.<sup>49</sup> To help meet the challenge of the mass of reports, ATIC received the cooperation of the Air Weather Service to try quickly to learn if a sighted object was a weather balloon or a temperature inversion.<sup>50</sup> Project Blue Book stopped issuing monthly reports and the entire staff worked on screening and filing the reports, some staff members working a sixteen-hour day. The Pentagon liaison officer, Major Dewey Fournet, began working full-time to keep the Pentagon informed about all the reports.<sup>51</sup>

During these hectic summer months there was a series of important sightings over Washington, D.C. On July 10 the crew of a National Airlines plane saw a strange, bright light just south of Washington in Quantico, Virginia. On July 13 another air crew spotted an unusual object about sixty miles south of the capital: the object came directly up to the plane from below, hovered for a few minutes, and then flew straight up at a tremendous speed. On July 14 a Pan American Airlines' crew reported seeing eight UFOs near Newport News, Virginia. The next day observers on the ground reported a UFO in the same area.<sup>52</sup>

On July 19 and 20, between 11:40 p.m. and 3:00 a.m., a group of unidentified flying objects appeared on two radarscopes at the Washington National Airport.<sup>53</sup> The objects moved slowly at first, about 100 to 130 miles per hour, and then shot away at "fantastic speeds." During this same time, several airliner crews reported seeing mysterious lights moving erratically up, down, and sideways; the objects slowed down, speeded up, and hovered. The visual sightings corresponded with the radar returns. Chief Radar Controller Harry Barnes directed other pilots

to investigate the lights, and these pilots got close enough to see the objects. At 3:00 a.m. two F-94 jet fighters were "scrambled" to attempt to intercept the objects; radar showed the objects disappearing as the jets neared the area and the jet pilots were unable to make visual contact. At the same time, people on the ground reported seeing strange lights making erratic maneuvers. (There are indications that other airline pilots saw the objects but were reluctant to file reports for fear of ridicule.) Some of the objects had flown over the restricted air corridors above the White House and the Capitol.<sup>54</sup>

During the night, radarscopes continued to track "targets" in the Washington, D.C., area. At one time all three radar installations at Washington National Airport, and also those at Andrews Air Force Base, picked up the same targets three miles north of the city. Early in the morning the Air Route Traffic Control section at Washington National Airport called Andrews Air Force Base to report it had a target that appeared to be directly over the Andrews' radio tower. The radio operators rushed out and saw "a huge fiery-orange sphere" hovering directly above them.<sup>55</sup> The press swamped Al Chop, the Pentagon Public Information Officer, with inquiries, who said he could not comment until the Air Force had studied the situation. The Air Force refused to admit that it had scrambled a jet interceptor.<sup>56</sup>

Events calmed down until the following weekend. On July 26, at 10:30 p.m., Washington National Airport radar once again picked up unidentified flying objects. Tracking began immediately. An hour later Andrews AFB sent jets to intercept the objects. As on the previous weekend, the objects disappeared from the radar screens when the fighters

arrived; the pilots saw nothing and returned to the base.<sup>57</sup> As soon as the targets disappeared from the radarscreens, people in Newport News, Virginia, began to report unidentified flying objects--bright lights rotating and emitting alternating colors. A few minutes later Langley Air Force Base in Virginia saw a strange light and ordered another jet scramble. It vectored the jet to the object. The pilot spotted the light but, as before, it disappeared "like somebody turning off a light bulb" when he attempted to approach it. The jet did manage to obtain a radar lock-on to the invisible target for a few minutes.<sup>58</sup>

When the jet returned to Langley Field, the targets reappeared over Washington. Once again Andrews AFB ordered jets to investigate. This time, however, the returns stayed on the radarscopes even after the jets entered the area. A game of "tag" ensued. Each time the jets were able to get close enough to the targets for close-range observation, the objects sped away. At one point in the "chase" a pilot noticed the lights were surrounding his plane and nervously asked the ground controllers what to do. Before they could answer, the lights moved away from the plane and left the area.<sup>59</sup> After twenty minutes of fruitless chasing, the jets ran low on fuel and returned to base. The pilots had seen only lights in the sky. Al Chop and Dewey Fournet watched the radarscopes during the entire chase sequence. During this same time the radar operators noticed weather targets, the result of a mild temperature inversion surrounding the Washington area. The operators claimed that they could easily tell the difference between the "actual" targets and the returns from the temperature inversion.<sup>60</sup>

These Washington sightings were the most sensational to occur since the Mantell incident in 1948. They made headlines around the country, even replacing front-page news of the Democratic National Convention in many newspapers. At 10:00 a.m. on the morning after the sightings, Brigadier General Landry--at the request of President Truman--called Intelligence authorities in Dayton, Ohio, to find out what was happening in the skies over Washington. Ruppelt took the call and personally briefed Landry on the phenomenon. Later Ruppelt learned that Truman had been listening in on the conversation.<sup>61</sup> A day later, July 28, an "unidentified Pentagon spokesman" (probably Fournet or Chop) told the Washington Post that the Air Force was "fairly well convinced" the objects were not a menace to the country. While the Air Force could not discount the extraterrestrial hypothesis, it leaned toward the theory that the objects represented a new kind of physical phenomenon about which it knew very little. "One thing I would like to do," the spokesman said, "is dispel the belief of some that we are holding something back. We are not."<sup>62</sup>

The Pentagon and Blue Book were swamped with press and congressional inquiries about the UFO situation. The Air Force decided to hold a press conference to allay fears and rumors. On July 29, 1952, the Air Force held the longest and largest press conference since World War II. The spokesmen at the conference were: Major General John A. Samford (Director of Air Force Intelligence), Major General Roger A. Ramey (Chief of the Air Defense Command), Colonel Donald L. Bowers (ATIC's Chief of the Technical Analysis Division), Ruppelt, several civilian electronics experts, and radar expert Captain Roy L. James who knew about the Washington sightings only from newspaper reports.

Samford headed the conference. He said the Air Force was reasonably well convinced that the radarscope sightings on the past two weekends were the result of temperature inversions (one of Menzel's "solutions"); the radar equipment had picked up ground lights reflecting off a layer of cold air between two layers of warm air. Captain James supported this by providing technical details on temperature inversions. Samford then explained that the Air Force was planning to call in outside scientists to examine the Washington sightings more closely (there is no evidence it ever did this). He said the diffraction grid scheme, still in the planning stage, had top priority and would help in gaining accurate scientific measurements of the objects. The Air Force could not account for the fact, Samford admitted, that some of the airlines' pilots had actually seen the objects. He noted that no astronomer had ever seen a flying saucer, but that the Air Force had received a certain number of reports of "unknown" objects from "credible observers of relatively incredible things"; these unknowns were running about 20 percent of total reports received.<sup>63</sup> Finally Samford explained that none of the saucers seemed to be a threat to the national security.<sup>64</sup> Although all the participants at the conference seemed to agree, Ruppelt later said that Dewey Fournet and a Navy radar expert who were both in the radar room during the July 26 sightings were not invited to attend the conference because they did not believe in the temperature inversion theory.<sup>65</sup> The news conference had a soothing effect on the nation's press. Most reporters and editors fully accepted the Air Force's version of the events on July 19 and 26.

The New York Times heralded the Samford news conference. The Times volunteered the information that the Air Force press statements

were the result of its analysis of "the thousands of plausible reports of apparitions that have poured in during the last six years." Radar detected the objects over Washington, the Times explained, because it could not distinguish among birds, ribbons of tinsel, cellophane, and rain. The Times suggested that the Air Force should continue studying UFOs only because it could gain knowledge about meteorological conditions.<sup>66</sup> Bill Lawrence, writing in the Times, asserted that the explanation for the saucers should be sought in the realm of mass psychology rather than in scientific legitimacy.<sup>67</sup> Taking a similar stance, the Christian Science Monitor chalked up the sightings to inadequately understood natural phenomena and "the vagaries of the human mind." The American people had problems enough, the paper said, without "breaking their stride over either heterogeneous oddities which so far display no menace or outbreaks of fancy without credible foundation."<sup>68</sup> Herbert B. Nichols, a special correspondent for the Monitor, explained that the public remained interested in the flying saucer mystery because it loved a mystery and "why spoil it?"<sup>69</sup> The Baltimore Sun compared flying saucers with the Loch Ness monster and the British "silly season." The reason why Americans saw more flying saucers was that America was a larger country and had a longer silly season.<sup>70</sup> The Milwaukee Journal explained that it took very little imagination to see a flying saucer and if imagination were not enough, "a little alcoholic stimulation will help."<sup>71</sup>

Some of the press was not so enthusiastic about the conference. The Washington Post, which had been in on the inner workings of the Washington sightings, decided upon a wait-and-see attitude. It criticized Menzel's theories: radar had "detected twelve different objects" and the

radar sightings were the most impressive to date. "The best advice at this point," the Post said, "would be to keep your mind open and your fingers crossed."<sup>72</sup> The Rocky Mountain News (Denver) found the Air Force's inability to identify the origin of UFOs "incredible" and "terrifying." The News suggested that the Air Force tell the public if these were military secret weapons; if the Air Force was unable to identify the objects, then "it should not boast about its scientific and military advances until it comes up with the right answer."<sup>73</sup> C. B. Allen, columnist for the New York Tribune, expressed a minority viewpoint: the Samford news conference "had gone far toward its obvious purpose of debunking the whole snow-balling phenomenon of 'Flying Saucers'."<sup>74</sup> Drew Pearson believed the news conference was important because the Air Force had admitted for the first time that personnel had recorded radar and observational data at the same time and implied that the objects could be from another planet.<sup>75</sup> Life magazine also noted that the Air Force had admitted concurrent radar, ground, and observational sightings. A Life reporter had asked the Air Force about the jet interceptors that it had originally denied dispatching; after a confrontation, it admitted to the jet action but made no other comment. The Life reporter posited that perhaps the Air Force had "known more about the blips than it admitted."<sup>76</sup>

The 1952 wave of sightings prompted some rather far-fetched theories about the origin of the saucers. Writer Elliot Lawrence, in an article in Coronet magazine, interviewed a man who had once witnessed a secret demonstration of a saucer-like craft; the inventor had blueprints for a spaceship that could "skip through the air like a flat stone." The witness did not know where the inventor was at present but thought

he had gone to Russia before the war and was still there. Therefore, the saucers were probably Russian secret weapons.<sup>77</sup> Physician Edgar Mauer, writing in Science, believed it was time to examine the problem of the existence of saucers in physiological spheres "other than the psyche," since scientists had not been able to come up with a plausible explanation. Mauer's analysis: "flying disks are motes in the eyes of a dyspeptic microcosm or perhaps some abnormal cortical discharges in the migrainous."<sup>78</sup>

The Washington sightings also prompted an outpouring of theories from scientists around the country. Professor C. C. Wylie, head of the Astronomy Department at the University of Iowa, said "the object" over Washington was the planet Jupiter. Unless the Air Force gave the complete answer to the sightings in clear astronomical terms, Wylie argued, "belief in visitors from outer space will be strengthened in those who cannot distinguish between speculation and scientific reasoning."<sup>79</sup> Dr. Gerard Kuiper, head of the Yerkes Observatory in Williams Bay, Wisconsin, said the objects were weather balloons.<sup>80</sup> Dr. Jessie Sprowls, professor of abnormal psychology at the University of Maryland, stated in a radio interview that the reports were the product of hallucination; his advice was: "Just sort of forget about it."<sup>81</sup> Dr. Horace Byers, chairman of the Meteorology Department at the University of Chicago, attributed the sightings to "junk" in the skies, such as balloons, meteors, reflections, clouds, and the like. "I know of no reputable scientist who places any credence in reports that so-called flying saucers come from a mysterious or unexplained source," he said.<sup>82</sup> Dr. Otto Struve, University of California astronomer, explained that the evidence for the reality of

flying saucers "appears to be completely negative to an astronomer."<sup>83</sup>

Dr. I. M. Levitt, director of the Fels Planetarium in Philadelphia, agreed with the inversion theory and said the sightings were due to mirages and temperature inversions.<sup>84</sup> Dr. Donald Menzel asserted again that the sightings would disappear "when the present hot spell is over."<sup>85</sup> Even Einstein had an opinion about the flying saucers. When a Los Angeles evangelist asked him to comment, Einstein replied: "These people have seen something. What it is I do not know and I am not curious to know."<sup>86</sup>

In the summer of 1952 Dr. J. Allen Hynek conducted a private poll of forty-four astronomers around the country about their views on UFOs. He found that 5 percent claimed to have seen a UFO. This, Hynek explained, was understandable because they spent more time watching the skies than most people; however, astronomers also could discriminate between what was unusual and what was not. In probing their attitudes toward the subject, Hynek found that 16 percent were completely indifferent, 27 percent mildly indifferent, 40 percent mildly interested, and 17 percent very interested. Most of them believed that UFO reports could be explained as misrepresentations of conventional objects. But, when Hynek took the time to explain the exact nature of the phenomenon and to describe some of the more puzzling cases, "their interest was almost immediately aroused, indicating that their general lethargy is due to lack of information." Hynek also found an "overwhelming fear of publicity." A newspaper headline to the effect of "Astronomer Sees A Flying Saucer" would be "enough to brand the astronomer as questionable among his colleagues." Hynek concluded that most astronomers were not

actually hostile to the subject but did not want to become involved because of publicity and the tenuous and unreliable nature of the data.<sup>87</sup>

The Washington sightings marked the high-water point of the 1952 wave. ATIC received 218 reports in August,<sup>88</sup> still more than three times the normal amount but half the July total. The Blue Book staff concentrated on filing and screening. The monthly status reports remained suspended but work on the questionnaire, the statistics project, and the diffraction grid continued.

The saucer sightings had affected the military. Not only was Blue Book immersed in a huge backlog of reports, but air bases and installations around the country were feeling the effects as well. On August 1, 1952, The New York Times reported that the Air Force had been getting so many flying saucer inquiries that "regular intelligence work had been affected." An Air Force spokesman (probably Fournet) reported that one full-time man was already working on the press inquiries and still other people in other departments had to answer some of the questions.<sup>89</sup> The Christian Science Monitor said that Captain F. R. Shafer, Commanding Officer of the Air Force Filter Center in South Bend, Indiana, was receiving so many flying saucer reports that he was forced to spend a few hours every day studying them. The same was true, the report said, for Captain Everett A. Turner of the Chicago Filter Center; his weekends had been "hectic," devoted to screening and sending in his reports to Washington and ATIC.<sup>90</sup> General Ramey appeared on the nationally-televised CBS show "Man of the Week" a few days after the Washington news conference to answer questions about flying saucer reports. Essentially saying the same things that Samford had said at the conference, Ramey also noted

that the Air Force was trying to come up with "fast answers" in order to avert hysteria.<sup>91</sup>

Perhaps Air Force Chief of Staff General Hoyt Vandenberg best summed up the rising feelings of many Air Force officials in an interview with the Seattle, Washington, Post-Intelligencer. After reiterating that the saucers were neither extraterrestrial, products of foreign technology, nor secret weapons, he bluntly stated that he did not like the "continued, long-range occurrence of what might be called mass hysteria about flying saucers." He went on to say that "The Air Force has had teams of experts investigating all reports for several years, since the end of World War II, and they have never found anything to substantiate the existence of such things as flying saucers."<sup>92</sup>

After an interview with Donald Menzel, Look quoted him on September 9 as saying once again that the saucers in Washington, D.C., were mirages. The reason that both the pilots and radar saw the same objects was that they were both "operating under the same meteorological conditions." Furthermore, Menzel reasoned, it was highly unlikely that the objects were extraterrestrial: if they have space ships, then they probably have radio, and if they have radio, they would have contacted us. "If inter-planetary travelers came here they wouldn't hang around like ghosts; they'd get off their ships and have a look at us. Wouldn't you on Venus?" Menzel remarked that the flying saucer "scare" could be dangerous "in the sense that if an enemy were to attack us tomorrow, it might take 24 hours for the people in the target area to make up their minds whether it really was a terrestrial enemy or somebody from Venus."<sup>93</sup>

Although the 1952 wave of sightings generated growing anxiety, it also created more genuine interest. The increasing number of articles about UFOs seemed to have contributed to the interest; Ruppelt found that in a six-month period 148 newspapers carried 16,000 items about UFOs.<sup>94</sup> Many previously sceptical people now wanted to know more about the phenomenon. As a result, some professional people initiated projects to study the flying saucer reports. In Wisconsin a group of electronics engineers and technicians from a reserve unit of the Army Signal Corps set up "Project Vortex," the purpose of which was to receive information about UFOs and conduct research.<sup>95</sup> The Wichita, Kansas, Beacon organized thirty part-time reporters to be on "camera alert" for UFOs.<sup>96</sup> Ohio Northern University initiated an independent UFO investigation that scientists at the university would conduct. In spite of the increased public interest in the phenomenon during the summer months, the university stated, "little has been done to adequately screen information and to aid in presenting a scientific appraisal of this phenomenon to the general public." Moreover, there was a need for a private organization to "objectively" collect the data and distribute the results of a careful study to the public. Ohio Northern hoped that its proposed study would "lead to a more logical appraisal of phenomena observed in all walks of life."<sup>97</sup> With this announcement Ohio Northern began soliciting reports and worked on the data for the next year.

During 1952 two private research groups came into being. The first was Civilian Saucer Investigation of Los Angeles, founded by Ed Sullivan, a technical writer for North American Aviation Corporation. The organization included scientists from the Los Angeles area with

Dr. Walther Reidel its most prominent member.<sup>98</sup> The second was the Aerial Phenomena Research Organization, which Coral Lorenzen (a private UFO researcher in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin) formed. Basically a collecting organization, APRO attempted to work independently of the Air Force and come to its own conclusion based on what evidence the group could amass. The organization published a bi-monthly newsletter, the APRO Bulletin.<sup>99</sup> With small membership, these two organizations were the first independent groups established for the specific purpose of looking into the flying saucer mystery.

Professional organizations now began to take an interest in the subject. In October 1952 the American Optical Society sponsored a symposium on UFOs and invited Drs. Hynek, Menzel, and Liddel (of the Bendix Aviation Corporation and a member of the Atomic Energy Commission) to give papers before the society. In his paper, Menzel reiterated his theories of mirage, reflection, refraction, temperature inversion, and the like. These theories could explain all sighting reports that the Air Force now listed as "unknown."<sup>100</sup>

Uerner Liddel took a similar stance in his paper, "Phantasmagoria or Unusual Observations in the Atmosphere." Frankly stating that he prepared the paper because "the nation was in the throes of a flying saucer scare," he thought it worthwhile "to take any action which might alleviate the hysteria."<sup>101</sup> Liddel's analysis was that "hucksters of science" caused much of the flying saucer scare. These people were mainly newspaper reporters who fed on the "scare" because it provided a "lucrative business." Liddel then attempted to explain some sightings, concluding that all reports basically stemmed from reflections, mirages, and

psychological inadequacies.<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, he argued, Americans' conditioned fear of atomic weapons and the secrecy surrounding them as well as the UFO sightings around atomic installations had contributed to the current "mass hysteria." "Thus, just as ghosts are seldom seen outside cemeteries or haunted houses, so flying saucers are seen at points of greatest fear psychosis." Liddel concluded that he knew of "NO" evidence leading to the extraterrestrial hypothesis and that all unexplained reports were due to insufficient scientific data.<sup>103</sup>

Hynek took a different approach. He directly attacked Menzel's and Liddel's theories and for the first time departed publicly from his hostility to the idea that UFOs were not ordinary objects. The events of 1952 had affected him. Instead of believing, as did many Air Force people, that all UFO reports were the result of hysterical public reactions to illusions, Hynek began to rethink this position in light of the quality and puzzling aspects of the reports. He gave several examples of particularly puzzling unexplained cases. He said that if the reports were not of natural phenomena, then "an obligation exists to demonstrate explicitly how . . . specific reports can be explained in terms of balloons, mirages, or conventional aircraft."<sup>104</sup> Hynek emphasized that ridicule of witnesses and the phenomenon itself acted against scientific interest in the subject: "nothing constructive is accomplished for the public at large--and for science in the long run--by mere ridicule and the implication that sightings are the products of 'birdbrains' and 'intellectual flyweights.' . . . Ridicule is not part of the scientific method and people should not be taught that it is." Taking a more practical stance, he concluded that the UFO problem was one of "science-

public-relations" in that the "chance has consistently been missed to demonstrate on a national basis how scientists can go about analyzing a problem."<sup>105</sup> After the symposium Hynek filed a report with Project Blue Book saying that the Liddel and Menzel papers were worthless; the two men had not studied the evidence or the literature and were not qualified to speak on the subject. Hynek felt his trip to the society was "un-productive."<sup>106</sup>

Some people in the Air Force were beginning to think Hynek was right, that perhaps UFO reports did represent something unknown or even extraterrestrial. The Air Force's investigation of the Fort Monmouth incident--the September 1951 sightings which were a major influence in the decision to reorganize Project Grudge--concluded that one of the four major radar and visual reports, the one from the T-33 pilot, remained unexplained.<sup>107</sup> Moreover, the official explanation for the Washington sightings, in spite of Samford's temperature inversion statements, listed them as "unknown."<sup>108</sup> Project Blue Book consulted with scientists working on the Battelle statistical plan about Menzel's theories and they agreed that "none of the theories so far proposed would account for more than a very small percentage of the reports, if any."<sup>109</sup> Pentagon Liaison Officer Fournet wanted to look into the situation more closely. After meeting with Ruppelt and two Pentagon officers (Colonels W. A. Adams and Weldon Smith), Fournet and the other three men decided to study the maneuvers and reported motions of the objects to determine whether they were under intelligent control. This idea had been around for some time, and the mass of data collected in the summer now made such a study feasible. If the study showed that the objects moved in a definite

pattern (rather than random), then the Air Force would have to consider the extraterrestrial hypothesis a serious alternative. Ruppelt and the Pentagon officers assigned the problem to Fournet, who began work on it immediately.<sup>110</sup>

By the end of 1952 the sighting wave subsided. The Air Force received a record number of 1501 reports for the year--nearly twice the number of reports received during all previous five years. And yet despite this number, Ruppelt estimated that the Air Force received only about 10 percent of the total sightings in the country.<sup>111</sup> With the number of reports declining, Project Blue Book resumed its pre-wave activities. It started issuing monthly status reports again. It sent the Ohio State questionnaire (completed in October) to everyone who filed a report; this greatly improved the quality of received reports.<sup>112</sup> The Battelle Institute's statistical study also was progressing. The scientists decided to stop collecting data at the end of 1952, because additional reports would yield similar data, and hoped to complete the study some time in 1953.<sup>113</sup> The diffraction camera plan was in the final stages of development. ATIC and Dr. Kaplan had hit upon the idea of using special two-lens "Videon" cameras, which could take stereoscopic pictures; ATIC planned to put a diffraction grid over one lens and leave the other free to take a normal picture of a suspected UFO. The cameras were accurate, inexpensive, and fairly simple to operate. ATIC began to negotiate in December with the Air Defense Command headquarters to place the cameras in air bases around the country and also to mount the grids on the lenses of F-86 gun cameras to take pictures from the air.<sup>114</sup>

The groups cooperating with Blue Book also made progress. The Air Defense Command had nearly completed its radarscope plan and directed personnel to place all radarscope cameras on a twenty-four hour alert. In addition, ADC made the Ground Observers Corps (a group of civilians who watched the skies for enemy planes that might have broken through the radar network) available to Blue Book and told the members to report any UFOs to ADC which would then forward them to ATIC.<sup>115</sup> The Navy directed all naval units to report UFOs directly to Air Force headquarters, ATIC, or the Air Defense Command. The Air Weather Service began to give full cooperation to Blue Book, supplying the project with data about weather conditions, balloons, inversions, and the like.

The year had been exceptionally hectic, and the Air Force breathed a collective sigh of relief at the end of 1952. While Fournet, Hynek, and others began to consider the extraterrestrial hypothesis as one explanation for the onslaught of reports, others in the Air Force and in intelligence circles were not so inclined: they still believed that the reports signified only psychological manifestations of a society in the grips of a "scare." As 1953 approached, many people in the Air Force thought that--for national security reasons--their best strategy was to reduce drastically, if not eliminate, the number of UFOs reported.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>"Project Grudge Special Report No. 1," 28 December 1951, contained in United States Air Force, Projects Grudge and Bluebook Reports 1-12 (Washington, D.C.: National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena, 1968), pp. 23-28. All subsequent references to Project Grudge and Blue Book reports in this chapter are from this volume and are cited by report number and date only. For Edward Ruppelt's discussion of this sighting, see his The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1956), pp. 91-92.

<sup>2</sup>Ruppelt, p. 93.

<sup>3</sup>Letter from Ruppelt to Max Miller, 13 February 1956 (files of the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena, Washington, D.C., which I hereafter refer to as NICAP); Ruppelt, p. 94.

<sup>4</sup>"Status Report No. 2," 31 December 1951, p. 33; "Status Report No. 3," 31 January 1952, p. 58; "Status Report No. 4," 29 February 1952, p. 67.

<sup>5</sup>Ruppelt, p. 114.

<sup>6</sup>"Status Report No. 1," 30 November 1951, p. 2; Ruppelt, p. 14.

<sup>7</sup>"Status Report No. 2," 31 December 1952, p. 33.

<sup>8</sup>"Status Report No. 3," 31 January 1952, p. 59.

<sup>9</sup>"Status Report No. 3," p. 59.

<sup>10</sup>"Status Report No. 1," 30 November 1951, pp. 3-4; "Status Report No. 2," 31 December 1951, pp. 33-34; "Status Report No. 3," 31 January 1952, p. 59; "Status Report No. 4," 29 February 1952, p. 67; "Status Report No. 5," 31 March 1952, p. 84.

<sup>11</sup>"Status Report No. 3," 31 January 1952, p. 59.

<sup>12</sup>"Status Report No. 6," 30 April 1952, p. 99.

<sup>13</sup>Ruppelt, pp. 136-137.

<sup>14</sup>Letter from Ruppelt to Max Miller, 13 February 1956 (NICAP); Ruppelt, p. 94; "Status Report No. 2," 31 December 1951, p. 34; "Status Report No. 3," 31 January 1952, p. 59.

- 15"Status Report No. 3," 31 January 1952, p. 59.
- 16"Status Report No. 1," 30 November 1951, p. 4. See also David R. Saunders and R. Roger Harkins, UFOs? Yes! (New York: Signet, 1968), p. 59.
- 17Ruppelt, p. 131.
- 18Ruppelt, p. 143.
- 19"Status Report No. 5," 31 March 1952, pp. 85-86.
- 20"Status Report No. 6," 30 April 1952, pp. 98-99.
- 21"Status Report No. 5," 31 March 1952, p. 86.
- 22"Status Report No. 5," p. 86.
- 23Ruppelt, p. 143.
- 24Department of the Air Force, Air Force Letter No. 200-5, 29 April 1952 (from the Air Force Archives at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama, which I hereafter refer to as MAFB); Ruppelt, pp. 133-134.
- 25Department of Defense, Office of Public Information, "Press Release," 3 April 1952, reproduced in Leon Davidson, ed., Flying Saucers: An Analysis of the Air Force Special Report No. 14 (4th ed.; Clarksburg, W.Va.: Saucerian Publications, 1971), p. A4.
- 26"Status Report No. 5," 31 March 1952, pp. 84-85.
- 27H. Bradford Darrach and Robert Ginna, "Have We Visitors from Space?," Life, 7 April 1952, p. 80.
- 28Darrach and Ginna, p. 86.
- 29"Status Report No. 6," 30 April 1952, p. 99.
- 30"Status Report No. 6," p. 99.
- 31New York Times, 13 April 1952, Sec. IV, p. 9.
- 32New York Times, 12 April 1952, p. 10.
- 33Ruppelt, p. 132. Two months later Life published a follow-up: R. Ginna, "Saucer Reactions," 9 June 1952, pp. 20-26. Ginna noted that there had been a "tremendous barrage" of letters and that more were coming in every day (p. 20).

<sup>34</sup>Ruppelt, pp. 131, 138. Accurate statistics on the number of reports sent to ATIC are difficult to obtain; the Condon Committee final report, Project Blue Book reports, and Ruppelt all give slightly different figures on monthly sighting report totals but are substantially in agreement about the yearly totals.

<sup>35</sup>Ruppelt, p. 149.

<sup>36</sup>"Status Report No. 7," 31 May 1952, p. 115.

<sup>37</sup>"Status Report No. 8," 31 December 1952, p. 136.

<sup>38</sup>"Status Report No. 8," p. 134.

<sup>39</sup>"Status Report No. 8," passim.

<sup>40</sup>Ruppelt, pp. 147-149.

<sup>41</sup>Donald H. Menzel, "The Truth About Flying Saucers," Look, 17 June 1952, pp. 35-39; "Those Flying Saucers" (an interview with Donald Menzel), Time, 9 June 1952, pp. 54-56. These articles are essentially similar in expounding Menzel's views.

<sup>42</sup>Menzel, Look, p. 39.

<sup>43</sup>Menzel, Time, p. 56.

<sup>44</sup>"Status Report No. 6," 30 April 1952, p. 99.

<sup>45</sup>J. Robert Moskin, "Hunt for the Flying Saucers," Look, 1 July 1952, p. 37.

<sup>46</sup>Moskin, p. 40.

<sup>47</sup>Moskin, p. 41.

<sup>48</sup>"Status Report No. 8," 31 December 1952, pp. 136, 143.

<sup>49</sup>Ruppelt, p. 132.

<sup>50</sup>"Status Report No. 8," 31 December 1952, p. 134.

<sup>51</sup>Ruppelt, p. 140.

<sup>52</sup>Ruppelt, p. 157.

<sup>53</sup>For a more complete description of the Washington, D.C., sightings, see: File on Washington, D.C., sightings, MAFB; Ruppelt, pp. 156-172; Donald E. Keyhoe, Flying Saucers From Outer Space (New York: Holt, 1953), pp. 68-69; Richard Hall, ed., The UFO Evidence (Washington, D.C.: NICAP, 1964), pp. 35, 77, 132, 149, 159; Post (Washington), 22, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30 July 1952.

<sup>54</sup>Keyhoe, p. 63; Hall, p. 159.

<sup>55</sup>Ruppelt, p. 160.

<sup>56</sup>Ruppelt, p. 162.

<sup>57</sup>Hall, p. 159; Ruppelt, p. 161.

<sup>58</sup>Ruppelt, p. 165.

<sup>59</sup>Hall, p. 159.

<sup>60</sup>Ruppelt, p. 166.

<sup>61</sup>Ruppelt, p. 167.

<sup>62</sup>Post (Washington), 29 July 1952, p. 1.

<sup>63</sup>Department of Defense, "Minutes of Press Conference held by General John A. Samford," 29 April 1952 (MAFB); Keyhoe, p. 76. Keyhoe's transcription of the Samford news conference is a fairly accurate and complete account.

<sup>64</sup>Samford minutes; Keyhoe, p. 76. See also Christian Science Monitor, 31 July 1952, p. 1; Post (Washington), 30 July 1952, p. 1; Ruppelt, p. 168.

<sup>65</sup>Ruppelt, p. 168.

<sup>66</sup>New York Times, 31 July 1952, p. 22.

<sup>67</sup>New York Times, 30 July 1952, p. 10.

<sup>68</sup>Christian Science Monitor, 31 July 1952, p. 12.

<sup>69</sup>Christian Science Monitor, 30 July 1952, p. 1.

<sup>70</sup>Sun (Baltimore), 1 August 1952, p. 10.

<sup>71</sup>Journal (Milwaukee), 30 July 1952, p. 24.

<sup>72</sup>Post (Washington), 25 July 1952, p. 18.

<sup>73</sup>Rocky Mountain News (Denver), 28 July 1952, cited in Keyhoe, pp. 69-70.

<sup>74</sup>Cited in Chronicle (San Francisco), 4 August 1952, p. 3. (Allen was part of the New York Tribune news service.)

<sup>75</sup>Post (Washington), 29 July 1952, p. 18.

- <sup>76</sup>"Washington's Blips," Life, 4 August 1952, p. 40.
- <sup>77</sup>Lawrence Elliot, "Flying Saucers: Myth or Menace?," Coronet, 19 November 1952, p. 50.
- <sup>78</sup>Edgar Mauer, "Of Spots Before Their Eyes," Science, 19 December 1952, p. 693.
- <sup>79</sup>New York Times, 29 July 1952, p. 20; 28 July 1952, p. 5.
- <sup>80</sup>Journal (Milwaukee), 30 July 1952, p. 2.
- <sup>81</sup>Journal (Milwaukee), 4 August 1952, p. 2.
- <sup>82</sup>Sun (Baltimore), 3 August 1952, p. 1.
- <sup>83</sup>"No Visitors From Space," Science News Letter, 30 August 1952, p. 143.
- <sup>84</sup>Chronicle (San Francisco), 30 July 1952, p. 2.
- <sup>85</sup>Post (Washington), 30 July 1952, p. 1.
- <sup>86</sup>Journal (Milwaukee), 30 July 1952, p. 2.
- <sup>87</sup>J. Allen Hynek, "Special Report on Conferences with Astronomers on Unidentified Flying Objects," 6 August 1952, p. 18 (MAFB). See also "Status Report No. 8," 31 December 1952, pp. 137-138.
- <sup>88</sup>"Status Report No. 8," p. 136.
- <sup>89</sup>New York Times, 1 August 1952, p. 19.
- <sup>90</sup>Christian Science Monitor, 30 July 1952, p. 10.
- <sup>91</sup>New York Times, 4 August 1952, p. 3; Sun (Baltimore), 4 August 1952, p. 1.
- <sup>92</sup>Sun (Baltimore), 31 July 1952, p. 1.
- <sup>93</sup>Chester Morrison, "Mirage or Not, Radar Sees Those Saucers Too," Look, 9 September 1952, p. 99.
- <sup>94</sup>Ruppelt, p. 13.
- <sup>95</sup>Journal (Milwaukee), 1 August 1952, p. 1.
- <sup>96</sup>"Wind is Up in Kansas," Time, 8 September 1952, p. 86.

<sup>97</sup>Ohio Northern University, "Project A: Investigation of Phenomena," 18 March 1953, p. 1 (from files of Aerial Phenomena Research Organization, Tucson, Arizona).

<sup>98</sup>Darrach and Ginna, p. 86.

<sup>99</sup>Interview with Coral Lorenzen, Head of APRO, June 1972.

<sup>100</sup>Donald H. Menzel, "Abstract," Journal of the Optical Society of America, XLII, No. 11 (November 1952), 879. Menzel did not submit his paper for publication but the Journal published his abstract.

<sup>101</sup>Urner Liddel, "Phantasmagoria or Unusual Observations in the Atmosphere," Journal of the Optical Society of America, XLIII, No. 4 (April 1953), 314.

<sup>102</sup>Liddel, p. 315.

<sup>103</sup>Liddel, p. 317.

<sup>104</sup>J. Allen Hynek, "Unusual Aerial Phenomena," Journal of the Optical Society of America, XLIII, No. 4 (April 1953), 312.

<sup>105</sup>Hynek, p. 313.

<sup>106</sup>"Status Report No. 9," 31 January 1953, p. 158.

<sup>107</sup>"Special Report No. 1," 28 December 1951, pp. 23-28.

<sup>108</sup>Ruppelt, p. 170.

<sup>109</sup>"Status Report No. 8," 31 December 1952, p. 138.

<sup>110</sup>Ruppelt, pp. 190-191.

<sup>111</sup>Ruppelt, p. 149.

<sup>112</sup>"Status Report No. 8," 31 December 1952, p. 139.

<sup>113</sup>"Status Report No. 8," p. 139.

<sup>114</sup>"Status Report No. 8," p. 141.

<sup>115</sup>"Status Report No. 8," p. 139.

## CHAPTER IV

## THE ROBERTSON PANEL AND ITS EFFECTS ON AIR FORCE UFO POLICY

Official policy on UFOs switched dramatically in 1953. After building its investigatory capacity in 1952, Project Blue Book by the end of 1953 could no longer adequately investigate or analyze UFO reports and functioned mainly as a public relations and collecting office. This change was due primarily to the recommendations of a group of scientists who formed the "Robertson Panel." The convening of this CIA-sponsored panel was a pivotal event in UFO history. Although much of the information concerning the impetus for the panel remains in CIA and Pentagon files and therefore unavailable, sufficient information is accessible to reconstruct most of the events leading to the Air Force's policy reversal.

The CIA became interested in the UFO phenomenon during the 1952 wave of sightings.<sup>1</sup> The CIA and some high ranking Air Force officers, including Generals Vandenberg and Samford, thought that the mass of UFO reports might constitute a threat to the national security. It was possible for Russia, or any other "enemy," to use UFOs as a decoy in preparation for an attack on the United States. It was possible that the American public might think that attacking enemy bombers were only flying saucers. At the least, a foreign power could exploit the flying saucer craze to make the public doubt official Air Force statements about UFOs and thereby undermine public confidence in the military. Moreover, the

volume of sighting reports in 1952 had clogged normal military intelligence channels and this certainly posed a danger during an enemy attack.<sup>2</sup>

To explore these possibilities and the UFO situation in general, the CIA convened a panel of nonmilitary scientists to analyze the Blue Book data. Five outstanding scientists in the physical sciences, two "associate" panel members, and various Air Force and CIA representatives met from Wednesday, January 14, to Saturday, January 17, 1953.<sup>4</sup> Dr. H. P. Robertson, formerly at Princeton and the California Institute of Technology and an expert in mathematics, cosmology, and relativity, chaired the panel. At that time he was director of the Weapons System Evaluation Group in the Office of the Secretary of Defense and a CIA classified employee.<sup>4</sup> Panel member Samuel A. Goudsmit, an associate of Einstein, discovered "electron spin" in 1925 in Holland, helped found a school of theoretical physics, and headed a mission at the end of World War II to investigate the Germans' progress in developing the atomic bomb. In 1953 he was on the physics staff of the Brookhaven National Laboratories.<sup>5</sup> Luis Alvarez, a high-energy physicist, contributed to a microwave radar system and the atomic bomb and received the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1968.<sup>6</sup> Thornton Page, former professor of astronomy at the University of Chicago, was a physicist at the Naval Ordnance Laboratory during World War II and in 1953 was deputy director of the Johns Hopkins' Operations Research Office.<sup>7</sup> Lloyd Berkner, the final panel member, had accompanied Admiral Byrd on the 1928-30 Antarctic expedition, had been a physicist with the Carnegie Institution's Department of Terrestrial Magnetism, had headed the radar section of the Navy Bureau of Aeronautics, and served as executive secretary of the Department of Defense's Research and

Development Board in World War II. Later he became special assistant to the Secretary of State and at the time of the panel was one of the directors of the Brookhaven National Laboratories.<sup>8</sup> Two associate panel members were J. Allen Hynek and Frederic Durant. Hynek was only invited to selected meetings. Durant, an Army Ordnance Test Station director, past president of the American Rocket Society, and president of the International Astronautical Federation, wrote the summary of the proceedings.<sup>9</sup> Also present were Ruppelt, Dewey Fournet, ATIC Chief General Garland, and CIA personnel: Dr. H. Marshall Chadwell, Ralph L. Clark, and Philip G. Strong.<sup>10</sup>

The panel convened on Wednesday without Lloyd Berkner, who did not arrive until Friday afternoon. It began by reviewing the CIA's interest in UFOs. Dr. Robertson requested that panel members investigate the reports according to their specialties. For example, astronomer Thornton Page should focus on nocturnal lights and green fireballs and Alvarez on radar cases. Then the panel watched two color films, both taken in daylight and showing "maneuvering" light sources in the sky. Nicholas Mariana had taken one movie in Great Falls, Montana, and Navy Commander Delbert C. Newhouse the other in Tremonton, Utah.<sup>11</sup> The Mariana film showed two flying objects behind a building and a water tower. The Newhouse film, which the Air Force had kept classified, showed twelve objects flying in loose formation through the sky. The Project Blue Book staff believed that the films were among the best evidence it had to give credence to the extraterrestrial intelligence hypothesis.<sup>12</sup>

Ruppelt briefed the panel on Blue Book's methods of tracking down UFO reports. Hynek described the Battelle Memorial Institute study which

was still in progress. The panel discussed a few case histories and saw a special movie of sea gulls in flight that attempted to duplicate the Newhouse film. It then heard a report on "Project Twinkle," the Air Force Cambridge Research Laboratory's attempt to decipher the green fireball mystery. General Garland spoke, explaining that more intelligence efforts coupled with better briefings should be used to sort and collect UFO reports. He recommended declassifying reports completely on a continuing basis and increasing ATIC's UFO analysis section.<sup>13</sup> Later, Hynek outlined a "skywatch" program which might be an inexpensive adjunct to current astronomical programs. Trained astronomers could photograph a UFO while doing other work through a program of this kind. Hynek suggested ten different observatories where Blue Book could implement this plan.<sup>14</sup>

On Friday morning Dewey Fournet read a paper on reported UFO movements, concluding that the extraterrestrial hypothesis was the key to the mystery. Although impressed that Fournet had been with the UFO project for fifteen months and was an aeronautical engineer, the panel members could not accept his interpretation of what they perceived as "raw, unevaluated reports."<sup>15</sup> During the three days of examining Blue Book data, the panel reviewed eight cases in detail, fifteen in general, and saw two movies. It discussed tentative conclusions and recommendations on Friday afternoon and commissioned Robertson to draft the final report. The members spent the next day correcting and altering the draft. The panel adjourned Saturday afternoon, January 17, ending the first government-sponsored, nonmilitary UFO investigation.<sup>16</sup>

Probably because of time limitations and the small number of reports the panel members examined, they seemed to disregard apparent anomalistic evidence in certain UFO reports. For example, the Navy Photograph Interpretation Laboratory spent 1000 hours analyzing the Newhouse film and concluded that the objects in the film were neither birds, balloons, aircraft, nor reflections; rather, they were "self-luminous." The laboratory based its analysis on the assumption that Newhouse's distance estimates were accurate. Rejecting this analysis, the panel members reasoned that Newhouse probably was mistaken in his distance estimates. As S. A. Goudsmit said, "by assuming that the distance was less, the results could be explained as due to a formation of ducks or other birds, reflecting the strong desert sunlight but being just too far and too luminous to see their shape. This assumption yielded reasonable speeds and accelerations." The panel concurred in the bird explanation.<sup>18</sup> The panel used similar reasoning to interpret the Mariana film. Mariana saw two jet planes about to land at a nearby air base just before his sighting. He testified, however, that he knew the difference between the planes and the objects. But because the jets and the two objects had appeared near the same place at about the same time, the panel reasoned that Mariana was probably mistaken and had in reality taken a film of the jets.<sup>19</sup>

After reviewing the data, the panel concluded that there was no evidence that UFOs represented a direct threat to the national security. The Air Force's concern over UFOs "was probably caused by public pressure," due to the number of articles and books on the subject. Nevertheless, the panel warned that "having a military source foster public concern in 'nocturnal meandering lights'" was "possibly dangerous." The implication was

that military interest in the objects might encourage people to believe that the objects were a potential threat to the national security.<sup>20</sup> The panel also concluded that the reports represented little, if any, valuable scientific data; the material was "quite irrelevant to hostile objects that might some day appear." Assuming that "visitors" would probably come from our solar system, Thornton Page noted that astronomical knowledge of the solar system made the existence of intelligent beings "elsewhere than on earth" extremely unlikely. Page also incorrectly assumed that UFO reports occurred only in the United States. The idea that extraterrestrial objects would visit only one country seemed "preposterous."<sup>21</sup>

Even though the panel did not believe that UFO reports were a direct threat to the national security, it did think that they were an indirect danger. The report commented that "the continued emphasis on the reporting of these phenomena does, in these parlous times, result in a threat to the orderly functioning of the protective organs of the body politic." The reports clogged military intelligence channels, might perpetrate mass hysteria, and might make defense personnel misidentify or ignore "actual enemy artifacts." In language reminiscent of Project Grudge's recommendations, the panel stated that the reports could make the public vulnerable to "possible enemy psychological warfare" by cultivating a "morbid national psychology in which skillful hostile propaganda could induce hysterical behavior and harmful distrust of duly constituted authority."<sup>22</sup>

Based on its conclusions, the panel made four recommendations. The first concerned Blue Book's diffraction camera, radarscope, and

skywatch plans. It suggested using the diffraction cameras--not to collect UFO data but to allay public anxiety, especially because the plan was the result of public pressure. Similarly, it recommended implementation of the radarscope plan because it could help explain natural interference in the radar screens. On the other hand, it rejected Dr. Hynek's expanded skywatch plan. "A program of this type," the panel argued, "might have the adverse effect of overemphasizing 'flying saucer' stories in the public mind."<sup>23</sup> In a second proposal, the panel suggested that the two major private UFO research organizations, the Aerial Phenomena Research Organization and the Civilian Saucer Intelligence, "be watched because of their potentially great influence on mass thinking if widespread sightings should occur. The apparent irresponsibility and the possible use of such groups for subversive purposes should be kept in mind."<sup>24</sup> Third, the members recommended that national security agencies take steps immediately to strip the UFO phenomenon of its "special status" and eliminate the "aura of mystery" that it had acquired. This could be done by initiating a public education campaign so that people can recognize and react promptly to true indications of hostile intent.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, in its fourth proposal, the Robertson Panel outlined a detailed program of public education with two purposes: "training and 'debunking.'" Training would help people identify known objects so that there would be "a marked reduction in reports caused by misidentification and resultant confusion." "Debunking" would reduce public interest in UFOs. The education program, by using the mass media, would concentrate on "actual case histories which had been puzzling at first but later

explained. As with conjuring tricks, there is much less stimulation if the 'secret' is known." Such a program would reduce "the current gullibility of the public and consequently their [sic] susceptibility to clever hostile propaganda." The panel suggested that the government hire psychologists familiar with mass psychology as consultants; it named a few, including one who had written a book on the 1938 War of the Worlds broadcast. The panel also recommended that the Air Force use an Army training film company, Walt Disney Productions, and personalities such as Arthur Godfrey in this massive educational drive.<sup>26</sup> In their discussion before making recommendations, the panel members had decided that a limited expansion of Blue Book's investigatory capacity was needed to increase the percentage of "explained" reports; this also was necessary to reinforce the proposed educational program.<sup>27</sup>

A few panel members may have prejudged the UFO issue. At the meetings, Robertson chastized Thornton Page for joking about UFO reports.<sup>28</sup> Writing in 1965 to a person interested in UFOs, S. A. Goudsmit said that he had not changed his mind about the UFO phenomenon since the panel meetings; he still believed the subject was "a complete waste of time and should be investigated by psychiatrists rather than physicists." He also claimed that the extraterrestrial theory was "almost as dangerous to the general welfare of our unstable society as drug addiction and some other mental disorders."<sup>29</sup> Hynek was aware of these attitudes and, although the panel members did not ask him to sign the final report, later stated that he would not have signed it even if they had asked. He argued that the panel made a judgment about UFOs in four days whereas he spent four years studying the problem and was unable to arrive at any

conclusions.<sup>30</sup> When asked why he did not speak out against the panel, Hynek replied that he was only "small potatoes" then; not only would the Air Force have ignored him, but he would have jeopardized his standings with the Air Force and with the astronomical community.<sup>31</sup>

The Robertson Panel conclusions were roughly similar to those of the 1949 Projects Sign and Grudge reports. Sign also wanted the Air Force to "eliminate or greatly reduce the mystery" associated with UFOs. Grudge found that enemies could use UFOs to create a "mild form of hysteria" in the public and recommended publicity to dispel "public apprehension."<sup>32</sup> Both Sign and Grudge found that UFOs represented no direct threat to the national security. Also, the Robertson report, like the Sign and Grudge reports, set the tone of future Air Force UFO policy. The panel did not recommend declassification of the sighting reports and did not exercise its apparent opportunity to move the study from the military to the academic community. Rather, the panel implied that the Air Force should tighten security, continuing the situation whereby nonmilitary personnel could not obtain the technical and anecdotal information the Air Force had amassed over the last four years. The panel believed that the dissemination of information would lead to increased public awareness of UFOs and this would eventually mean an increase in sightings. It seemed to assume that keeping quiet would make most UFOs disappear.

The Robertson report also had important public relations ramifications. It enabled the Air Force to state for the next fifteen years (until 1969) that an impartial scientific body had examined the data and found no evidence of anything unusual in the atmosphere. Moreover, the panel gave the Air Force's UFO program a military raison d'être: it had

to investigate UFO reports because they were a possible threat to the national security; enemy nations could exploit the phenomenon to their advantage. The Air Force could now sidestep the substantive issues and still be involved with the public relations aspects. Because the Air Force had to monitor all flying objects with a potential threat to the national security, and because the Robertson Panel had established both the objects' potential threat and "conventionality," Blue Book was relieved of the main investigating burden but continued to collect and examine sighting reports as part of its overall mission.

The panel submitted its formal conclusions and recommendations to the CIA and, as far as can be ascertained, to the Pentagon and higher echelons of the Air Force. Robertson showed the final report to General Cabell (former Director of Intelligence) who expressed satisfaction with it. The CIA did not give a copy of the report to Ruppelt or his staff in 1953, although it did release a summary to Blue Book a few years later.<sup>33</sup> But a few days after the panel adjourned, Ruppelt claimed that the CIA did summon him and Garland to its headquarters to tell them about the recommendations. As Ruppelt reported it, the officials explained that the Robertson Panel had recommended an expansion of the Blue Book staff, the use of instruments for more accurate measurements, and a termination of all secrecy in the project through a declassification of sighting reports.<sup>34</sup> If Ruppelt understood and reported correctly, it remains a mystery why the CIA gave out this false information. The panel members had recommended continued use of some plans in their discussions but had not made this the focus of their formal recommendations.

Armed with CIA "recommendations" and orders from his superiors to follow them, Ruppelt began implementation. First, he tried to have the Newhouse film declassified and shown to a press conference. This was to be a major event because in 1952 the press had heard rumors of the film and Fournet had fought hard with the Air Force Office of Information to release it.<sup>35</sup> But just before the showing was to take place, Air Force officials stopped it and the press conference. According to Ruppelt, the military believed the sea gull theory was weak. Moreover, the new publicity policy was to keep silent.<sup>36</sup>

Other events happened at Project Blue Book that Ruppelt could not account for. Toward the end of 1952 the Air Force began to work out a nationwide plan to set up cameras in connection with radar units (this plan was different from the plan to take photographs of radarscopes). The cameras would photograph any UFO that radar picked up and would provide accurate measurements of the objects. The Air Force hoped that this plan would either take the place of the diffraction grid camera plan or supplement it. Suddenly, and seemingly without reason, the Air Force abandoned it, saying that the diffraction cameras would suffice.<sup>37</sup> Even the radarscope plan, which the panel had suggested, was not producing valuable information. Thus, the diffraction camera scheme, which was ready for implementation, assumed even more importance. The Air Force placed about 100 Videon cameras equipped with diffraction grids in air bases around the country and tested them. After a few weeks of testing, however, it found that because of chemical decomposition the grids were slowly disintegrating and losing their light-separating ability. It decided to try to repair or substitute the grids but never did, finally

abandoning the entire idea. After one full year of work, the Air Force allowed the diffraction camera plan to die, although the Videon cameras without grids remained in operation at the bases.<sup>38</sup>

In the face of growing Pentagon opposition to mounting a full-scale UFO investigation, Ruppelt conceived an idea to supplement his diminishing Blue Book staff.<sup>39</sup> During wartime the 4602nd Air Intelligence Service Squadron, a unit within the Air Defense Command, gathered intelligence from captured enemy pilots. But during peacetime the unit only simulated this activity and had no other duties. In a February 1953 briefing to high ranking ADC officers, Ruppelt suggested that the 4602nd take over Project Blue Book's field investigation. The men of the 4602nd would get on-the-spot investigation experience and also expand Blue Book's field work. General Garland liked the idea and, with General Burgess, worked out the transfer plan, which became operative in December 1953. It was the last major expansion of Blue Book's activities.<sup>40</sup>

Ruppelt temporarily left Blue Book in February 1953 for a several-month assignment in Denver. Since his replacement never came, this left a staff lieutenant in charge. When Ruppelt returned he found that the Air Force had reassigned several members of his staff and had sent no replacements. Eventually the Blue Book staff dwindled to Ruppelt and two assistants. This was not in keeping with the panel's recommendation, as Ruppelt understood it, to expand Blue Book. According to Ruppelt, his superior officers gave him orders to "build up" Blue Book; yet every time he tried to add personnel or expand in any way, the Air Force refused to concur. Ruppelt left Blue Book permanently in August 1953. As a reserve he had been reactivated for the Korean War; now that it had ended he

accepted a position in private industry. No replacement came for him and he turned over his command to Airman First Class Max Futch.<sup>41</sup> The fact that an airman commanded the project demonstrates the priority that the Air Force placed on it.

Dewey Fournet left the Pentagon in the same year. With these two departures vanished the last effective military support for the continued study of UFOs based on the premise that they could be extraterrestrial vehicles. Hynek still supported such study but he was not a member of the military and could only submit suggestions. Moreover, although he believed the Air Force should study the subject systematically, he feared ridicule from the academic community if he came out strongly for a continued systematic investigation. Hynek simply kept quiet and continued in his role as consultant.<sup>42</sup>

During the first half of 1953, even as the Air Force decided to downplay publicity about UFOs, popular UFO speculation boomed. Donald Keyhoe headed the field when an excerpt of his book, Flying Saucers From Outer Space, appeared in an October issue of Look magazine. Keyhoe began the book in the summer of 1952, acting on Blue Book's new "liberal" attitude toward the press. Having heard General Samford say at the July 1952 press conference that the Air Force had no reason to classify sighting reports, Keyhoe asked Al Chop, Pentagon UFO Information Officer, for numerous classified reports. The Office of Information routinely denied Keyhoe's request. But Chop, who was leaning toward the extraterrestrial hypothesis, asked Dewey Fournet to help. Fournet, who also tended toward the extraterrestrial theory, was successful in having all the sightings

that Keyhoe requested declassified and turned over to him.<sup>43</sup> With these sightings, Keyhoe had enough information for his new book.

The Air Force feared that the excerpt of Keyhoe's book in Look would result in another rash of sighting reports. To combat this, it pressured Look into including an Air Force disclaimer in the article. The disclaimer stated that the information contained in the article was unofficial and that the Air Force had found nothing unusual about the objects. In addition, Look allowed the Air Force to insert parenthetical remarks disputing certain points throughout the article.<sup>44</sup>

As well as trying to "neutralize" the expected impact of the Look article, Air Force officials charged that Keyhoe had obtained his sighting reports fraudulently and that the Air Force had no record of releasing them.<sup>45</sup> Keyhoe went directly to Al Chop to counter this claim. Chop had resigned his press information post in March 1953 over a disagreement with the Air Force's new policy of silence. He willingly signed an affidavit stating that he had released the sighting reports, which were from official Air Force files, to Keyhoe. Eventually the Air Force admitted that this was the case.<sup>46</sup> The entire affair deepened Keyhoe's conviction that a massive "cover-up" was taking place within the Air Force to keep vital information from the public. Keyhoe believed that high ranking Air Force officials "knew" that UFOs represented extra-terrestrial intelligence and the fact that they had not informed the public of this "fact" meant only one thing: a conspiracy of silence. Keyhoe's book, Flying Saucers From Outer Space, came out in October 1953 and was one of the most widely read books of the decade. According to Keyhoe, it sold 100,000 hardbound and 400,000 paperbound copies.<sup>47</sup>

Through its sales, Keyhoe kept his position in the forefront of private UFO investigators.

Although Keyhoe believed more than ever in an Air Force cover-up, he admitted in his book that he might have been wrong about the Air Force trying to cover-up information in the early days of the controversy. But, he said, "they knew a lot more than they were telling now."<sup>48</sup> He contended that the reason the Air Force kept facts from the American public was to prevent possible panic and hysteria. Keyhoe had heard the argument that an enemy possibly could use the flying saucer "scare" to its advantage. But he turned the argument on its head. By 1954, Keyhoe wrote, the Russians would have, according to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the ability to stage a massive atomic attack. Keyhoe reasoned that the Russians, just before the attack, could claim the saucers were actually secret weapons. "By starting false rumors of Russian saucer attacks, they might cause stampedes from cities, block defense highways, and paralyze communications just before an A-bomb raid." Therefore, a "grave danger" existed if the Air Force refused to correctly identify the saucers as extraterrestrial vehicles.<sup>49</sup>

Keyhoe had learned many of the basic facts. He had obtained the sighting reports from Blue Book files; he had heard rumors of the Robertson Panel meetings and recommendations, although he could not verify them; he accurately identified the people within the Air Force sympathetic to his reasoning by establishing a direct line to the Air Force through Fournet and Chop. The problem was his interpretation of these facts. He could not know all the Air Force and CIA reasons for their actions. But because he lacked access to all the information, his interpretation--

that the Air Force blocked full release of information about UFOs to avoid public panic and hysteria--seemed to be the only answer to the Air Force's puzzling behavior. For Keyhoe all outward indications of the Air Force's actions led to the conspiracy thesis. Because Keyhoe's facts were basically correct, the Air Force could not invalidate or refute his interpretation unless it disclosed fully the rationale for its activities. Therefore, the Air Force's main "counterattack" in 1953 was to issue press releases denying Keyhoe's claims and to ward off additional publicity. This only reinforced Keyhoe's contentions and the effect was circular: the more the Air Force denied Keyhoe's conspiracy charge, the more it seemed to be "covering-up."

At about the same time that Keyhoe released his book, Donald Menzel published his long-awaited book on the subject as well. Menzel was the first American scientist to write a book on UFOs. He had not changed his mind about the phenomenon. As in previous articles, he explained again in Flying Saucers that the objects were mainly uncommon atmospheric occurrences: temperature inversions, reflections, lenticular clouds, sun dogs, mock suns, ice crystals floating in the clouds, optical illusions, and, especially, mirages. The very idea that UFOs represented extraterrestrial intelligence seemed ludicrous to him. People who accepted this idea were lunatics, cultists, religious fanatics, or at best frightened and confused.<sup>50</sup>

Menzel, thinking that a direct attack on specific sighting reports was the best way to explode the "saucer myth," attempted to "solve" each major sighting that had achieved notoriety. The foo-fighters of World War II were the sun's reflections shining off imperfections of a

bomber wing tip; Captain Mantell had chased a mock sun.<sup>51</sup> Chiles and Whitted had seen a meteor. The "windows" and structure they reported, Menzel concluded, were products of overexcited imaginations.<sup>52</sup> To show how self-seekers had taken advantage of the gullible public, Menzel dwelled on the famous hoaxes that had taken place a few years before. He erroneously claimed that there were more hoaxes than legitimate reports in the beginning of the phenomenon, and he spent an entire chapter describing Frank Scully's 1950 semi-hoax, Behind the Flying Saucers, and the events surrounding it.<sup>53</sup> Menzel also dealt with the 1896-1897 "airships." This moved these sightings into the raging UFO debate. Menzel believed that the airships were either twinkling stars that appeared to move because of atmospheric refraction, cigar-shaped lenticular clouds, or mirages. The entire airship affair was a product of mass illusion; people wanted to see an airship and therefore did. To back up his argument, Menzel quoted Edison's statement that airship sightings were ridiculous. This, Menzel said, effectively burst the airship bubble and the sightings stopped after newspapers around the country published Edison's statement. If a person sighted an airship after the publication of Edison's remarks, Menzel reasoned, the sighter obviously had not read the article.<sup>54</sup>

To reinforce his arguments Menzel once again stressed the potential dangers of UFOs in psychological warfare. Americans were suffering from a case of "international jitters," Menzel said, and had been conditioned to report anything unusual because they were anxious about an atomic war. Also, science fiction writers had conditioned the American public to believe in other intelligent life in the universe;

therefore, the public interpreted anything unusual in the sky as being evidence for this.<sup>56</sup> Menzel saw no difference between the 1952-53 flying saucer scare and the hysterical reaction to the Orson Welles 1938 invasion from Mars broadcast.<sup>57</sup> Menzel, as did the Robertson Panel, believed that the sightings represented a possible danger to the national security. "The public is afraid of saucers--and we need only a match to set off a nation-wide panic that could far exceed that of the Invasion from Mars. In fact, if a foreign power were to pull off a surprise attack on the United States, millions of Americans would conclude that the flying saucers from Mars or Venus were finally landing!"<sup>58</sup>

Menzel's book was successful. Published at the same time as the Keyhoe book, many libraries had to decide which book to purchase. They more often bought Menzel's book because he was an established scientist. Sometimes libraries bought both and put the Menzel book in the science section and the Keyhoe book in the science fiction section.<sup>59</sup> One librarian was so hostile to Keyhoe's book that he decided that "no amount of rationalizing about 'future historical importance,' 'balanced collections,' and 'public demand,' can justify their expenditure of tax dollars for books such as Keyhoe's--books whose purpose seems to us to satisfy a jaded taste for the bizarre and the sensational."<sup>60</sup> In addition, Keyhoe's popularity and looseness in thinking helped legitimize Menzel's views. Menzel wrote his book in an "acceptable" scientific manner. This, coupled with the subject's inherent "illegitimacy," enabled Menzel's views to achieve substantial influence in the scientific community.

While the Keyhoe-Menzel "debate" raged, the Air Force implemented parts of the Robertson Panel recommendations. Although there is no evidence that it ever seriously attempted the "educational program," it did try to reduce the publicity about reports and therefore the number of reports. For its first action the Air Force issued Air Force Regulation 200-2 in August 1953. It established new reporting procedures: an air base "UFO Officer" still had to make a preliminary report of a sighting to Blue Book but he did not have to write a detailed report unless specifically asked to do so. This gave Blue Book tight control over the number of written reports it received.<sup>61</sup> In December the Air Force amended regulation 200-2 to change the UFO publicity policy. A previous Air Force letter (200-5 issued in 1952) stipulated that the highest classification a report could have was "restricted" and that local publicity should be avoided.<sup>62</sup> Air Force Regulation 200-2 went even further: it ordered Air Force personnel not to release any data whatsoever, other than saying an investigation was underway. The Air Force would inform the news media only when it positively identified an object. Regulation 200-2 also made it possible for Air Force personnel to conduct a preliminary investigation of a sighting and send it to ADC (the 4602nd AISS), which then conducted the field investigations. Finally, regulation 200-2 stated that the Air Technical Intelligence Center (where Blue Book was located) was responsible for analyzing the data.<sup>63</sup>

Regulation 200-2 was itself restricted information. In other words, for the first time the Air Force moved to institutionalize a system of secrecy at the air base level. To further ward off publicity leaks, the Joint Chiefs of Staff followed up 200-2 with Joint-Army-Navy-

Air Force-Publication (JANAP) 146 in December, 1953. Under the subheading of "Canadian-United States Communications Instructions for Reporting Vital Intelligence Sightings," the Joint Chiefs of Staff made releasing any information to the public about a UFO report a crime under the Espionage Act, punishable by a one-to-ten year prison term or a \$10,000 fine. JANAP 146 applied to anyone who knew it existed, including commercial airline pilots.<sup>64</sup> This action effectively stopped the flow of information to the public. Only if Blue Book could positively identify a sighting as a hoax or misidentification would the Air Force release information to the public. The policy was in effect until December 1969, when the Air Force terminated its involvement with UFOs.

The Blue Book status reports subtly reflected the Air Force's new attitude toward sightings. Instead of issuing monthly reports as before, Blue Book issued only four more status reports, all during 1953 and the first two in January and February. The reports displayed a certain defensiveness and concern for public relations. For instance, Blue Book mentioned in all four reports that the decline in sighting reports was due to a decline in newspaper publicity. There was a "direct relation" between newspaper publicity and UFO reports: one "highly publicized sighting would again trigger off another 'saucer' scare with resulting pressure on the Air Force and ATIC." Because of possible public hysteria, Project Blue Book was preparing a fact sheet for the Public Information Officer in Washington to release. "Thus the Air Force cannot be accused of withholding information." ATIC's concern with public relations was further demonstrated in its new policy of channeling all its

releases and information through the Secretary of the Air Force's Office of Public Information.<sup>65</sup>

Blue Book's last major ongoing project in 1953 was the Battelle Memorial Institute's statistical study of UFO characteristics. The institute had finally completed the study. It concluded that the objects did not appear to represent anything unknown or outside the capabilities of human technology, even though earlier in the year the institute acknowledged that the data were highly unreliable.<sup>66</sup> Instead of immediately issuing the report to the press, evidence exists which suggests that the Air Force decided to delay the study's release until the "proper" time.<sup>67</sup>

Thus, the Air Force's involvement with the UFO controversy changed character rather completely during 1953. A year earlier Blue Book, under Captain Ruppelt, had tried to set up procedures whereby it could systematically study the UFO phenomenon, at least within the bounds set by its limited funds and resources. But by the end of 1953 the opportunity for such an investigation was gone. Project Blue Book had only three staff members, its investigating capabilities had gone to another command, and most of its projects had died for lack of funds. Ruppelt, Fournet, and Chop were no longer involved and General Garland never again raised his voice in defense of a UFO investigation. The CIA-sponsored Robertson Panel changed Blue Book's role from seeking the causes of sightings to keeping the sighting reports at a minimum or, preferably, stopping them completely. Although Project Blue Book continued its work, it would never again be able to conduct a thorough investigation. From 1953 to 1969 Project Blue Book's main thrust was public relations.

The CIA recommendations became critical for future Air Force action. It would claim for years afterward that it had conducted an adequate scientific investigation, complete with instruments (radarscope camera and Videon diffraction grid) to measure UFO characteristics. Moreover, the Air Force would use the Robertson Panel as "proof" that it had sought the most able scientific evaluation. Meanwhile, the Air Force had unexpected help in its public relations efforts. A growing number of flying saucer "believers," who subscribed to the views of a new group of people called "contactees," emerged in 1953 to confuse the controversy even more. But that is another story.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Transcript of UFO Briefing to Subcommittee on Atmospheric Phenomena, House Select Committee on Astronautics and Space Exploration, 8 August 1953, p. 3 (from the Air Force Archives at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama, which I hereafter refer to as MAFB).

<sup>2</sup>Memorandum, Air Technical Intelligence Command to Air Defense Command, 23 December 1952 (MAFB); letter from S. A. Goudsmit to author, 9 February 1972: "communication channels had been nearly saturated during an outbreak of UFO hysteria shortly before our meeting. We considered this a real danger . . . ."

<sup>3</sup>The duration of the meetings is a subject of controversy. Ruppelt said the meeting started on January 12 and went for five days. The Robertson Panel minutes puts the date at January 14-18. According to a copy of the minutes, the date of January 14-17 is correct.

<sup>4</sup>Who Was Who in America, 4 (New York: Marquis Co., 1968), p. 800.

<sup>5</sup>Who's Who in America, 36 (New York Marquis Co., 1971), p. 865. See also: Edward U. Condon, project director, Scientific Study of Unidentified Flying Objects (New York: Bantam edition, 1969), pp. 516-517.

<sup>6</sup>Who's Who, p. 37.

<sup>7</sup>Who's Who, p. 1733.

<sup>8</sup>Who Was Who, p. 1051.

<sup>9</sup>Edward J. Ruppelt, The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1956), p. 241.

<sup>10</sup>The CIA members' names are still classified. However, Dr. James McDonald was able to obtain these names in a trip to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in 1967. Originally the report contained an appendix with the names of all the participants, but the list has since been removed. (McDonald's notes are in the files of the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena, Washington, D.C., which I hereafter refer to as NICAP.)

<sup>11</sup>Frederick C. Durant, "Report of Meetings of Scientific Advisory Panel on Unidentified Flying Objects," 14-18 January 1953, p. 3 (MAFB), which I hereafter refer to as Robertson Report. Also contained in Condon, pp. 896-899.

- <sup>12</sup>Ruppelt, p. 219.
- <sup>13</sup>Robertson Report, pp. 3-5.
- <sup>14</sup>Robertson Report, p. 17.
- <sup>15</sup>Robertson Report, pp. 4-5, 17.
- <sup>16</sup>Robertson Report, p. 6.
- <sup>17</sup>Robertson Report, p. 12.
- <sup>18</sup>Robertson Report, pp. 12-13; letter from S. A. Goudsmit to author, 9 February 1972.
- <sup>19</sup>Robertson Report, p. 13.
- <sup>20</sup>Robertson Report, p. 9.
- <sup>21</sup>Robertson Report, pp. 11-12.
- <sup>22</sup>Robertson Report, Tab A.
- <sup>23</sup>Robertson Report, p. 18, Tab A.
- <sup>24</sup>Robertson Report, pp. 23-24.
- <sup>25</sup>Robertson Report, Tab A, pp. 19-22.
- <sup>26</sup>Robertson Report, pp. 20-22.
- <sup>27</sup>Robertson Report, pp. 21-22.
- <sup>28</sup>Letter from Thornton Page to author, 7 February 1972.
- <sup>29</sup>Letter from S. A. Goudsmit to J. A. Hennessey, 25 February 1965 (NICAP); letter from S. A. Goudsmit to J. A. Hennessey, 10 March 1965 (NICAP).
- <sup>30</sup>J. Allen Hynek, "Are Flying Saucers Real?," Saturday Evening Post, 17 December 1966, p. 19.
- <sup>31</sup>Interview with Hynek, February 1972.
- <sup>32</sup>See Chapter II, pp. 61-62, 66-69.
- <sup>33</sup>Letter from Ruppelt to Leon Davidson, 7 May 1958, contained in Leon Davidson, ed., Flying Saucers: An Analysis of the Air Force Special Report No. 14 (4th ed.; Clarksburg, W.Va.: Saucerian Publications, 1970), p. B3. Exactly when the CIA released the summary to Blue Book is not known.

<sup>34</sup>Letter from Ruppelt to Davidson, in Davidson, p. B3.

<sup>35</sup>Ruppelt, p. 228; Donald E. Keyhoe, The Flying Saucer Conspiracy (New York: Holt, 1955), pp. 39-40.

<sup>36</sup>Ruppelt, p. 228.

<sup>37</sup>Ruppelt, p. 229.

<sup>38</sup>United States Air Force, "Status Report No. 10," 27 February 1953, Projects Grudge and Bluebook Reports 1-12 (Washington, D.C.: NICAP, 1968), p. 180 (hereafter I will refer to all Status Reports only by number and date); "Status Report No. 11," 31 May 1953, p. 204. Also see Ruppelt, p. 229.

<sup>39</sup>Ruppelt, p. 231.

<sup>40</sup>Letter from Major Robert C. Brown to Commanding General, Air Defense Command, 5 March 1953 (MAFB); Memorandum, "Division of Responsibility ATIC-ADC," December 1953 (MAFB); "Status Report No. 10," 27 February 1953, p. 179; Memorandum, "Briefing of ADC Forces and Divisions of Project Blue Book," 12 November 1952 (MAFB); Memorandum, "Project Blue Book Special Briefing for Air Defense Command," March 1953 (MAFB).

<sup>41</sup>Ruppelt, pp. 231-232.

<sup>42</sup>Interview with J. Allen Hynek, February 1972.

<sup>43</sup>Keyhoe, Conspiracy, p. 44.

<sup>44</sup>Donald E. Keyhoe, "Flying Saucers From Outer Space," Look, 20 October 1953, pp. 114-120.

<sup>45</sup>Keyhoe, Look, p. 114.

<sup>46</sup>Keyhoe, Conspiracy, p. 55; telegrams from Albert M. Chop to Keyhoe, n.d., December and October 1953? (NICAP).

<sup>47</sup>Interview with Keyhoe, April 1972.

<sup>48</sup>Donald E. Keyhoe, Flying Saucers From Outer Space (New York: Holt, 1953), p. 124.

<sup>49</sup>Keyhoe, Flying Saucers From Outer Space, p. 249.

<sup>50</sup>Donald H. Menzel, Flying Saucers (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), passim.

<sup>51</sup>Menzel, p. 22.

<sup>52</sup>Menzel, p. 15.

<sup>53</sup>Menzel, pp. 149-166.

<sup>54</sup>Menzel, p. 80.

<sup>55</sup>Menzel, p. 57.

<sup>56</sup>Menzel, p. 171.

<sup>57</sup>Menzel, pp. 143-144.

<sup>58</sup>Menzel, p. 148.

<sup>59</sup>Norman J. Crum, "Flying Saucers and Book Selection," Library Journal, LXXIX (October 1954), 1719-1725.

<sup>60</sup>David Flick, "Tripe for the Public," Library Journal, LXXX (February 1955), 202.

<sup>61</sup>Department of the Air Force, "Air Force Regulation 200-2," 12 August 1954, contained in Davidson, pp. 135-138. The author was unable to obtain a copy of AFR 200-2, 26 August 1953 and 2 November 1953.

<sup>62</sup>Department of the Air Force, "Air Force Letter 200-5," 29 April 1952 (MAFB).

<sup>63</sup>"AFR 200-2," 12 August 1954. See also "Status Report No. 12," 30 September 1953, p. 219.

<sup>64</sup>Joint-Army-Navy-Air Force-Publication 146, December 1953, contained in Lawrence J. Tacker, Flying Saucers and the U.S. Air Force (Princeton, N.J.: Van Nostrand, 1960), pp. 127-135.

<sup>65</sup>"Status Report No. 11," 31 May 1953, p. 200; "Status Report No. 12," 30 September 1953, p. 216.

<sup>66</sup>"Special Report No. 14," 5 May 1955, contained in Davidson.

<sup>67</sup>See section in Chapter VI on "Special Report No. 14."

## CHAPTER V

## CONTACTEES, CLUBS, AND CONFUSION

As public interest in unidentified flying objects grew, the UFO phenomenon entered popular culture. Because of its nature, the phenomenon easily lent itself to science fiction, fantasy, sensationalism, and hoax. In the early and middle 1950s two "groups" in American society exploited the sensational aspects of the phenomenon. As would be expected, the Hollywood movie industry entered the scene early, capitalizing on the growing audience for stories associated with UFOs. But the group that captured public attention most was the "contactees"--people who claimed personal contact, communication, and interaction with beings from another planet. Rising to popularity at the same time as the Air Force was trying to reduce the number of UFO reports, the contactees increased publicity on the subject and counteracted many of these Air Force efforts. Similarly, the contactees hindered the attempts of people concerned about the UFO phenomenon to convince the public and the Air Force to treat the phenomenon seriously. Exactly what impact the contactees had on American thought about the UFO phenomenon is, at this date, conjecture. The contactees did not participate directly in the debate over the origin of UFOs, but they embodied many of its elements and became a divisive force in the controversy.

Since the 1950s there were some instances when reputable individuals claimed "close encounters" with UFOs. Occasionally, people with

no discernible reason to lie, who were respected members of a community--teachers, ministers, policemen--claimed to have seen "occupants" or "beings" in or near a UFO. Puzzled and frightened, these witnesses usually reported their experiences to the police or Air Force because they wanted a reasonable explanation for such a fantastic experience. They usually asked for anonymity and were not interested in gaining publicity or money. Their UFO experience seemed to be an aberration from the normal flow of their daily lives. Nothing in their backgrounds suggested that they hallucinated or perpetrated a hoax (although a serious investigator could not ignore these possibilities). Sometimes these witnesses presented "evidence" of their experience in the form of corroborating witnesses, flattened and scorched grass, broken tree limbs, and depressed triangular markings in the ground. Often they claimed that these encounters produced strange side-effects, such as electrical failures, automobile engine failure, and radio interference.<sup>1</sup> In addition, there were instances when individuals who, apparently because of psychological problems, had delusions of communicating with extraterrestrial beings. These people often claimed to receive signals from outer space or have mystical encounters with space men. Their experiences did not constitute aberrations from their daily lives, and their stories usually were incoherent, inconsistent, or part of a pattern of psychical or occult experiences. Like the first group, these people usually did not seek publicity or fabricate hoaxes intentionally.<sup>2</sup>

The contactees represented an entirely different type of UFO witness. They exhibited behavior that was consistent with the assertion that they fabricated hoaxes. They did not report their experiences to a

reputable investigatory agency. Instead, they publicized them by writing books and articles, presenting lectures, and appearing on radio and television shows. Indeed, the contactees had no fear of ridicule and eagerly sought publicity. They often organized special flying saucer clubs based on their experiences and used the clubs to help publicize their stories. Also, their "experiences" often differed markedly from all other UFO observers, in that some contactees claimed to have taken a "ride" in a flying saucer and described the ride and the planets they visited in great detail. Moreover, some contactees reported that space people had charged them with a "mission" which, they said, was why they had to seek publicity.

The five major contactees who rose to national "stardom" in the 1950s were George Adamski, Truman Bethurum, Daniel Fry, Orfeo Angelucci, and Howard Menger. Each attracted a large following. The five men also knew each other and reinforced each other's claims.

George Adamski was the most famous contactee of the 1950s. He worked as a handyman in a four-stool cafe near Mount Palomar, California. Previous to his encounters with the spacemen, he had billed himself as "professor" and written a tract about a body of thought that he devised and called the "Royal Order of Tibet."<sup>3</sup> Failing to gain recognition as a mystic, he turned to science fiction to capitalize on his interest in astronomy and photography. His main endeavor in this genre was a novel he wrote in 1946 about an imaginary trip to the stars.<sup>4</sup>

When the flying saucer interest began, Adamski conceived of a way to take advantage of the current interest. The product of this idea was Flying Saucers Have Landed, which he co-authored with British writer

Desmond Leslie in 1953. In the book Adamski related his contactee experiences. They began in 1946 when he "actually saw with [his] own naked eyes a gigantic space craft." The next year Adamski saw 184 saucers one night passing over him one after the other "as if in review." Unfortunately, he took no pictures of this extraordinary procession. From then on, he said, he observed the saucers regularly.<sup>5</sup>

Adamski's first "contact" came on November 20, 1952, when he and four friends saw a "space ship" land about one mile off the road in Desert Center, California. He told his friends to wait at the car and rushed to the landing spot, taking pictures all the way (he had two cameras with him). When he neared the craft, a man with long blond hair confronted him. The man was from Venus. Adamski and the Venusian conversed telepathically and by sign language; the Venusian told Adamski that he had come to Earth to stop atomic testing because the radiation from "fallout" was damaging the other planets in the solar system. The Venusian did not want his picture taken because then he would no longer be able to roam incognito among the "earthlings." The Venusian expressed an interest in a roll of Adamski's film and asked to borrow it, promising to return it soon. Adamski consented and the Venusian then allowed him to take pictures of the spacecraft as it took off and left the area. Adamski took over seven rolls of film that day; unfortunately, he forgot to focus one camera and the other was not working properly. The result was one blurry photograph. After the Venusian took off in his spacecraft, Adamski looked in the desert sand and discovered the Venusian's footprints which had strange hieroglyphics in the middle of the soles; Adamski happened to have some plaster of paris and made casts of the

footprints. He and several friends attempted in vain to decipher the hieroglyphics.<sup>6</sup>

Adamski's major work, Inside the Space Ships, appeared in 1955. He told how he met incognito space people in Los Angeles bars and cafes. At various times, they invited him aboard Martian, Venusian, Saturnian, and Jupiterian spaceships. On board these ships Adamski met beautiful Martian and Venusian spacewomen and the elder philosopher of the space people--the Master. While the women served refreshments, Adamski and the Master engaged in long and deep conversations about the state of the universe and Earth's position in it. The Master described other planets' social and political systems and made it clear that Earth was primitive. The space people were benevolent beings who had come to save mankind from eventual atomic destruction and, as the Master explained, to stop the Earth's atomic radiation from harming the other planets. The space people had a dual mission: to save the earthlings from themselves and to save the universe from the earthlings. They told Adamski that they had selected individuals to carry their message to the people. Jesus had been one of these messengers; Adamski was another. He had to carry their message to the Earth people and bear the ridicule of those who would not believe him.<sup>7</sup>

Truman Bethurum followed Adamski's lead in 1954 with Aboard A Flying Saucer. Bethurum was then a mechanic laying asphalt in the California desert. One night eight to ten little men awakened him as he was sleeping near his "rig," and he noticed a flying saucer near them on the ground. The little men took the curious Bethurum aboard the "scow," as they called it, and introduced him to the captain, a gorgeous woman

named Aura Rhanes. She was similar to Earth women except for her extraordinary beauty. Aura explained that she and her crew came from a planet called Clarion which was in the same solar system as Earth. Astronomers could not see Clarion because its orbit always placed it directly behind the sun. The Clarionites had been coming to Earth for many years and were able to walk around unnoticed. They were "very religious, understanding, kind, friendly and . . . trusting."<sup>8</sup> They had come to Earth, Aura explained, to reaffirm the values of marriage, family, and fidelity, because a "dreadful Paganism" was at work and the Clarionites did not want to see Earth people destroy themselves.<sup>9</sup> Aura feared atomic war and wanted to prevent Earth from blowing itself up, an event that would perpetrate "considerable confusion" in space.<sup>10</sup> In the course of their lengthy discussions, Aura explained to Bethurum in detail the idyllic quality of life on Clarion, a life that Earth people could enjoy if they thought and behaved correctly. Before the Clarionites departed for home, Bethurum met with them eleven times. Sometimes he saw them in cafes, but there they ignored him because they did not want to reveal their identities. When they finally left and Bethurum told his story, no one believed him except George Adamski, who encouraged him to publicize his experiences. Bethurum thought Adamski was a great man and an authority on space travel.<sup>11</sup>

In the same year (1954) "Dr." Daniel Fry's White Sands Incident came out.<sup>12</sup> One night, when Fry was working in an unspecified capacity at the White Sands Proving Ground in New Mexico, he saw a flying saucer land near him. He walked up to it and heard a voice say: "Better not touch the hull, pal, it's still hot!" This frightened him but the voice was reassuring: "Take it easy, pal, you're among friends."<sup>13</sup> The voice,

which later identified itself as "A-lan," invited Fry into the saucer and explained the details of the saucer's power. Fry remembered the conversation and was careful to record the technical data:

When certain elements such as platinum are properly prepared and treated with a saturation exposure to a beam of very high energy photons, the binding energy particle will be generated outside the nucleus. Since these particles tend to repel each other as well as all matter they, like the electron, tend to migrate to the surface of the metal where they manifest as a repellant force.<sup>14</sup>

Alan, as Fry called the voice, whisked him to New York City and back in about thirty minutes. During the flight Alan told Fry to write a book about this experience to prevent the world from falling into the "terrible abyss" that nuclear weapons brought about.<sup>15</sup> The spacemen, Alan explained, were forced to contact Fry because they would upset the "ego balance" of the Earth's civilization if they showed themselves.<sup>16</sup> Alan said that the key to peace and happiness for Earth was "understanding": if all the nations on Earth would just understand each other, then there would be no more war.<sup>17</sup>

Orfeo Angelucci, a mechanic at an aircraft corporation, continued the contactee tradition in 1955 with his mystically-oriented Secret of the Saucers. Angelucci's experiences began when he saw a flying saucer land in a Los Angeles field; he inspected the craft and heard a voice, which identified itself as a "space brother," explain that he was visiting Earth to record the "spiritual evolution of man." He was concerned that Earth's "material advancement" was endangering life's evolution.<sup>18</sup> A few weeks later Angelucci saw another flying saucer in the same location and entered it on impulse. Inside a voice revealed the secrets of the saucer's power. He took a "ride" in the saucer and was so impressed that, during

the flight, he underwent a mystical-religious experience that demonstrated his kinship with the space people. After the flight he met a spaceman named "Neptune" who instructed him about the universe and life in space.<sup>19</sup>

Angelucci then began to meet the spacemen in mundane places. For instance, one contact took place in the Greyhound Bus Terminal. Unable to keep these experiences a secret, he gave weekly talks, published a newspaper, and attended flying saucer conventions where he met other contactees whom he admired greatly.<sup>20</sup> One day he realized that he had had amnesia for a week and eventually discovered that he had been spiritually transported to another planet. There he met the beautiful Lyra and Orion who explained that Angelucci had been a spaceman named "Neptune" in another life. They exposed Angelucci to all the wonders of their beautiful planet and told him that Earth had better change its course--by mankind working together benevolently--or a calamity would ensue in 1986. Angelucci returned to Earth knowing that in his first life he was a spaceman with his spiritual heritage in the heavens.<sup>21</sup> In a later contact, Angelucci met Jesus, who told him that the space people were on Earth to help mankind and were traveling incognito everywhere. "This is the beginning of the New Age," Jesus said. At his last meeting with Lyra, Angelucci drank from the crystal goblet and finally understood that, even though he must return to the mundane world, he, Lyra, Orion, and the other Neptune were joined together forever in love.<sup>22</sup>

Howard Menger, a self-employed sign painter, was the fifth of the major contactees. He told about his experiences in From Outer Space To You (1959). Menger had his first contact as a child: he was playing in the woods when he chanced upon a beautiful woman who told him that the

space people were watching over him. He did not have another contact until he was an adult but sensed during all those years that the space people were helping him; he felt that they had helped save his life in World War II.<sup>23</sup> When the space people finally contacted Menger again, they revealed that they came from Mars and Venus. They took him to the Moon and gave him a guided tour of the wonderful buildings and sights there. Menger explained that the Moon's atmosphere was similar to the Earth's and that he could breathe the air easily.<sup>24</sup> Eventually Menger learned that he was a reincarnated Jupiterian put on Earth to perform good deeds for the benefit of mankind. At one of his lectures about his experiences, he met a beautiful woman, "Marla," whom he immediately recognized as being from space, even though she did not know this herself. Menger divorced his wife and married Marla; they made a "natural couple," destined for each other because of their common heritage.<sup>25</sup> During his lecture tour, Menger met contactee George Van Tassel who accompanied him on the tour. Later Menger met George Adamski and said he was a "great soul."<sup>26</sup>

The Adamski, Bethurum, Fry, Angelucci, and Menger stories all contained similar concepts. They defined the contactee literature genre and illustrated the contactees' anthropomorphic style of thinking. These concepts possibly reflected the contactees' anxieties about post-World War II American society and, more specifically, the prospect of atomic war, the role of religion in a technological society, the yearning for peace and harmony in the cold war political climate, and the possibility of extraterrestrial visitation. An analysis of these themes is at least essential for understanding why the contactees became so popular.

According to the contactees, space people came from utopian planets free from war, poverty, unhappiness, or want. Everyone on Clarion was employed and poverty was unknown.<sup>27</sup> No Earth-like problems existed, although some extraterrestrials did mention "enemies." Moreover, the space people, if not immortal, lived thousands of years and usually could be reincarnated in another life. The planet Angelucci visited had "eternal youth, eternal spring and eternal day."<sup>28</sup> The contactees portrayed the space people as rational, technologically-advanced, perfected "humans" who understood the disastrous implications of Earth's technology. Angelucci's space people told him that "man's material knowledge has far outstripped the growth of brotherly love and spiritual understanding in his heart."<sup>29</sup> Operating within a common fear of the 1950s--the inevitability of atomic war--the contactees invested the space people with missions that promised society a release from cold war tensions. The space people came to help Earth people avoid war, stop atomic testing, and help mankind work together for a benevolent society. But they were not completely altruistic and were working for their own interests as well as those of Earth. They wanted to stop atomic testing because the leaking radiation affected their planets; they wanted to stop an atomic war because it would upset the solar system's delicate balance. The contactees avoided potentially troublesome political issues in the 1950s by having the nonideological space people expound these beliefs and by taking an anticommunist stance in their literature.

In keeping with the aliens' "humanity" and benevolence, they came from planets where civilization was based on a God-figure, such as the "Infinite Father" or "Infinite Creator." The space people lived within

a religious ethos that supported their moral reason for coming to Earth. They placed Jesus in a secondary position and did not worship him because he died on Earth for Earth people. The contactees said that either the space people or God sent Jesus to Earth to fulfill a mission. Jesus, the Master told Adamski, "was sent to be reincarnated on your world to help your people, as had others before him." His death taught the space people to carry on their mission "in a way less perilous to those concerned than actual birth on your planet."<sup>30</sup> For Angelucci's aliens, Jesus was an "infinite entity of the sun" and "not of earth's evolution."<sup>31</sup> In this sense, the contactees transformed Jesus into a spaceman and allied God, Jesus, and the space people into a unified system. Moreover, because both Jesus and the contactees were space "messengers," the contactees compared themselves to Jesus and thereby strengthened the impact of the religious implications of their experiences. Although the contactees never claimed to be on a religious par with Jesus, the parallel was still clear.

Apart from religious and ideological implications, the contactees dealt with a host of more mundane problems. In explaining why aliens did not land publicly, they juxtaposed the space people's benevolence with the Earth people's hostility and psychological frailty. It was these Earth qualities that prevented the aliens from landing publicly. As Adamski said: humans would have a "tremendous amount of fear" of the space people and probably would "tear [them] to pieces."<sup>32</sup> Daniel Fry's Alan explained that most Earth people would consider the space people "potential tyrants" and would try to destroy them.<sup>33</sup> Menger's space friends feared that a landing would result in hysteria and panic and,

Menger reasoned, "there would be endless investigations and controversy, and the work and message the space people have come to deliver would be snowed under by red tape."<sup>34</sup> But contacting selected Earth people was not a problem for the space people. Regardless of where the aliens were from, be it Mars, Venus, Jupiter, or Clarion, they looked like human beings, except that the women were fantastically beautiful. Thus, the space people were able to mingle incognito with humans.

If the space people looked just like Earth people, why did they not carry out their own mission instead of having a human do it? The contactees did not answer this question. They side-stepped it with self-conscious explanations of why the space people chose them. They chose Adamski because, in photographing saucers for many years, his thoughts "inevitably" reached them and demonstrated his "sincerity."<sup>35</sup> They chose Bethurum simply because he "happened to be close" when the "scow" landed.<sup>36</sup> They selected Fry because he had one of those rare brains that can receive as well as send telepathic signals.<sup>37</sup> Also, the "buffetings of fate" gave Fry an "unusual depth and breadth of perception and understanding" which made him an ideal contact.<sup>38</sup> The aliens contacted Angelucci because he was simple, humble, publicly unknown, and possessed a "higher vibrational pattern" than other men.<sup>39</sup> Aliens singled out Menger because he was one of "them," a "rebirth" from another planet.<sup>40</sup> Presumably these characteristics made it easier for the contactee to carry out his prescribed "mission."

Along with these personal qualities, all the contactees had the experience of entering and/or flying in a "saucer." This experience seemed to undergo an evolution in the contactee literature. Adamski,

who wrote first, observed the saucer close-up but could not enter it. Bethurum, the second contactee of 1953, entered the saucer but it did not leave the ground. The next year Fry claimed that he went from New Mexico to New York City. In Adamski's second book (1955), he claimed to have flown to the moon; he did not actually land but saw all its wonders--inhabitants, cities, plants--through a special viewing apparatus. He saw Venus the same way. Angelucci went farther. In addition to riding in a saucer, he was mystically transported to the planet "Lucifer," previously a piece of a larger planet that had existed in another time zone and had been destroyed in an ancient war before the aliens were benevolent. In Menger's 1959 account, his flying saucer landed on the moon where the inhabitants gave him a sightseeing tour. Menger was the only one of the five major contactees who claimed to have landed on a celestial body after a flight in a flying saucer. The "escalation" of contactee claims appeared to be a function of trying to "outdo" each other in their efforts to be "the" most important contactee. Yet most contactees seemed reluctant to become too sensational. They preferred not to overextend themselves scientifically. Menger, who constantly escalated his claims over the years, eventually found himself in completely indefensible scientific positions, and subsequent astronomical discoveries forced him to recant on many of his positions.

The heart of contactee literature was in the "mission" that the space people gave the contactee. This mission provided the central rationale for the contactee's publicity-oriented behavior. Adamski had to impart the Master's knowledge to Earth people so that they could avert the disaster of an atomic war.<sup>41</sup> Bethurum's task was to make sure that

the Earth people understood Aura Rhanes's message: unless Earth changed its ways, "the water in your deserts will mostly be tears."<sup>42</sup> Fry obeyed Alan's order to spread the word about universal "understanding" to prevent the Earth's nations from engaging in an atomic holocaust. Alan passionately directed Fry to "tell the story through your newspapers, your radio and television stations. If necessary, shout it from the house-tops, but let the people know."<sup>43</sup> The space people warned Angelucci of a terrible war of extreme devastation and charged him with a Christ-like mission: "For the present you are our emissary, Orfeo, and you must act! Even though the people of earth laugh derisively and mock you as a lunatic, tell them about us! As you love your brothers of Earth, Orfeo, fight to your dying breath to help them toward a world of love, light and unity."<sup>44</sup> Menger's friends did not specifically forecast a catastrophe but did tell him that wars, torture, and destruction would result from people's "misunderstanding"; Menger had to inform others of his experiences in the hope of promoting better understanding.<sup>45</sup>

The contactees had to make the Earth people believe them but had difficulty obtaining reasonable "evidence" to support their claimed experiences. Because Adamski's space people did not want him to take their pictures, he had to rely on the Venusian's footprints and a few blurry photographs. The Air Force analyzed Adamski's photos and decided they were probably hoaxes.<sup>46</sup> Bethurum's evidence was a note written in French that Aura Rhanes had supposedly translated into English and Chinese.<sup>47</sup> Angelucci and Fry offered no evidence, preferring to have their stories stand on their own merits. Menger was the only major contactee to offer tangible evidence. One day he chanced upon a cabin in the woods, inside

of which was a Saturnian playing the piano; the Saturnian told Menger that he too could play this enchanting music, even though he did not know how to play the piano. Menger arrived home to find that he could play the music he had heard and he immediately made a commercial record album.<sup>48</sup> On another occasion, one of Menger's space friends gave him a "space potato" which supposedly had five times the protein of an Earth potato.<sup>49</sup> Menger also built a small "free energy motor" from the space people's telepathic instructions; it did nothing in particular, but Menger considered it good evidence of alien visitation.<sup>50</sup>

Not having any reasonable evidence of their own, the contactees often used the Air Force's role in the controversy to prove that flying saucers existed. Adamski and Bethurum said that the Air Force's secrecy in investigating UFOs constituted proof that flying saucers existed.<sup>51</sup> Angelucci implied that the Air Force was a party to the space people's plans: the Air Force was handling the issue of extraterrestrial visitation "precisely as those visitors have anticipated and desired them to do." If the Air Force were to release all it knew about flying saucers, "It would be the beginning of national panic that no amount of sane reasoning could quell."<sup>52</sup> All this, of course, proved the existence of flying saucers.

A composite contactee "formula" was as follows. People from a utopian planet accidentally or by design contacted an unsuspecting human. The extraterrestrials gave the contactee a ride in their spacecraft, explained the workings of the craft, told about their own planet's civilization, and predicted dire events to take place on Earth that also would affect the other planets. They endowed the contactee with a mission

that, if successful, would avert the calamity, allowing Earth to exist in peace and harmony. The contactee, having little or no proof, embarked on a publicity campaign to get his "message" to the people.

Adamski, Bethurum, Fry, Angelucci, and Menger were the most prolific and publicized contactees but not the only ones. Minor figures existed as well, all of whom used the above formula and all of whom had their local followings. Buck Nelson flew to Mars, Venus, and the moon; as proof, he offered to sell packets of hair from a 385-pound Venusian St. Bernard dog.<sup>53</sup> The space people took George Van Tassel on a flying saucer ride and explained the "true history" of the beginnings of life on Earth.<sup>54</sup> George Hunt Williamson, one of the witnesses to Adamski's first contact, claimed that he could communicate with men from Mars by using a "ham" radio set and Ouija board. It seemed that the Martians had heard other earthlings communicate by radio and had "managed to dope out the language."<sup>55</sup> Lauro Mundo claimed to communicate telepathically with the space people.<sup>56</sup> Dana Howard went to Venus, married a Venusian, and raised a family--all while she was napping on her living room couch.<sup>57</sup>

Some contactees not only publicized their experiences but used them to appeal directly for money. Contactee George Van Tassel said the space people had dictated designs for a rejuvenation machine that would guarantee everlasting youth; all he needed was \$42,000 to develop the plans.<sup>58</sup> Otis T. Carr claimed to have plans for a genuine flying saucer and succeeded in raising many thousands of dollars to build it.<sup>59</sup> Although most contactees seemed to be in the flying saucer "business" primarily for money, at least one, Gabriel Green, saw the political potential as well. His California-based organization, "The Amalgamated Flying

Saucer Clubs of America," published Thy Kingdom Come, a semireligious magazine.<sup>60</sup> Using the organization and magazine as a political base, Green ran for the Presidency of the United States in 1960 on a "space and peace" platform but dropped out of the race before the election. Then he ran for the Senate in 1962, garnering over 171,000 votes.<sup>61</sup>

The contactees' chief problem was gaining publicity for their "messages" and themselves. They did this by writing books, pamphlets, and tracts, presenting lectures, and attending flying saucer conventions where they could sell their literature and deliver their lectures. George Van Tassel's annual Giant Rock Convention in Yucca Valley, California, became the largest and most highly publicized of such events. In 1954, its first year, the convention attracted over 5,000 people. Here the contactees gathered to lecture about their experiences. Spectators could buy books, pamphlets, photographs, records, and other souvenirs from the contactees' booths on the grounds. The conventioners generally assumed that the space people looked favorably upon the meeting and a participant was sure to spot a flying saucer near the area. If this did not happen, Van Tassel would sometimes send up a balloon with flares attached to it to create some excitement and controversy.<sup>62</sup> At times the space people would make their presence known in mysterious ways. Gray Barker, a popular contactee-oriented author and publisher, once found some blood near his book stall. He and others immediately were convinced that it was "space blood" from an extraterrestrial. Because the blood did not clot as they had expected, this, Barker claimed, substantiated his theory that space people walked among them. The "faithful" rallied to Barker's side and attacked the "sceptics" who wanted an

analysis of the blood before they would judge its origin. The sceptics won the debate later when the analysis proved the blood's menstrual origin.<sup>63</sup> Numerous flying saucer clubs held their own conventions and invited a contactee to lecture. Green's club sponsored some tremendously successful conventions in Los Angeles in the late 1950s; thousands of people attended and one convention agenda included over forty-five speakers for a two-day event.<sup>64</sup> These minor conventions became part of the contactees' lecture circuit. If business was slow, contactees sometimes would sponsor their own conventions, as Howard Menger did on his front lawn where excitement ran high when people spotted several blue lights rising from the back of Menger's barn.<sup>65</sup> Buck Nelson, who claimed to have eaten dinner with the rulers of nearly all the planets in the solar system, held a convention at his home in Missouri and was left with over 9,000 hot dogs when only 300 people attended.<sup>66</sup>

Radio and television shows also helped contactees gain publicity. The sensationalism of the contactees' claims always provided good entertainment. In New York "Long" John Nebel furnished the most consistent outlet for contactee stories on his late-night radio talk show; Menger's fame was chiefly due to his appearances on the Long John show.<sup>67</sup> Steve Allen's nationally-televised "Tonight" show featured many contactees as did the NBC Betty White Show on which Truman Bethurum appeared several times.<sup>68</sup> In addition to the national shows, many locally-broadcast shows helped feed the growing public feeling that the contactee and the contactee-oriented groups made up the essence of the UFO phenomenon. The public found it difficult to distinguish between contactee experiences and those of reputable witnesses. For example, a television producer

would invite Keyhoe to appear on a show with a contactee, not understanding the difference between these two people. Keyhoe usually refused these invitations because he did not want to be associated in any way with the contactees.<sup>69</sup>

The growth of flying saucer clubs in the mid-fifties clearly indicated the contactees' success in gaining publicity and their subsequent domination of the UFO "scene." These clubs were of two types: contactee clubs and contactee-oriented clubs. Many contactees organized their followers into local and national clubs designed to propagate their "message." Daniel Fry, using Alan's message about the importance of "understanding" in world politics, formed "understanding" units. With fifteen in California alone and more around the country, Fry had a ready market for his publication Understanding. George Van Tassel established the "College of Universal Wisdom," the entrance requirement being a subscription to Van Tassel's journal, Proceedings. George Adamski formed the "Adamski Foundation," and Truman Bethurum the "Sanctuary of Thought."<sup>70</sup>

The majority of flying saucer clubs were contactee-oriented. They were not centered around an individual contactee but the members believed contactee stories or, at least, kept an "open mind." Most of these people did not discriminate between Keyhoe's brand of serious UFO investigation and contactee claims. In 1954 the anticontactee Saucers magazine illustrated this confusion when it polled its readers about whom they considered the best authors on UFOs. Keyhoe came in first, followed by Adamski, Scully (Behind the Flying Saucers), and Fry.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, the Space Observers League of Spokane, Washington, fully supported Keyhoe and his theories and unhesitatingly accepted Daniel

Fry's claims.<sup>72</sup> Over 150 contactee-oriented clubs existed in the mid-1950s. Invariably, they held conventions and sponsored contactee lecturers. Also, the contactee clubs "blended" into occult areas, such as astrology and mysticism, and were able to assimilate many of the previously existing occult and psychic clubs which originally were not a part of the flying saucer "world." For example, an editorial in The Spacecrafter, the newsletter of the Phoenix, Arizona, Spacecraft Research Association, said that the club's "object" was to "acquaint ourselves with as many facts as possible concerning UFO's, Metaphysics, Mysticism, and other related subjects."<sup>73</sup>

The contactees and their publicity posed a serious threat to legitimate UFO investigation and research groups. These groups thought the contactees were confusing the public about whose activities were legitimate and whose were not. In addition, noncontactee-oriented UFO investigation groups were not nearly as popular as the flying saucer clubs and did not have as much support. The investigation and research groups tried to solve the UFO problem and refused to accept contactee claims, even though the members read about them in periodicals. As the contactees gained popularity, the investigation groups took on the difficult task of exposing them but were not often successful, for the contactee controversy created factions within their ranks. Orbit, a publication of one research group and one of the best periodicals in the early 1950s, folded partially because its readers shifted to contactee-oriented journals.<sup>74</sup> Most noncontactee groups published articles determinedly hostile to contactee claims. James Moseley's Nexus and Saucer News, Max Miller's Saucers, Lex Mebane's Civilian Saucer Investigation News-

letter, The UFO Newsletter, and other periodicals featured extensive exposés of Menger, Adamski, Van Tassel, and others.<sup>75</sup> To Keyhoe and Coral Lorenzen (the latter of the Aerial Phenomena Research Organization), the contactees were an "enemy." From 1953 to the early 1960s, Keyhoe and Lorenzen spent much time trying to correct the damage to the legitimacy of UFO research. Keyhoe complained to Lorenzen in 1954 that he spent a lot of time "cleaning up" after the contactees or "getting the record straight" about their claims.<sup>76</sup> Lorenzen wanted to expose Adamski by proving his photographs were fakes but, as Keyhoe pointed out, "Knowing it and proving it are, unfortunately, not the same thing."<sup>77</sup>

Eventually some of the exposés began to have an effect on the contactees' claims. Adamski's "witnesses" recanted many of their statements and considerably weakened his case, although he maintained his claims until his death in 1965.<sup>78</sup> When evidence mounted in 1959 that Howard Menger's experiences were fallacious, he tried to salvage his veracity by claiming his story was "allegorical" and his book "fact/fiction."<sup>79</sup> A New York lawyer, Jules B. St. Germain, developed a scheme to prove George Van Tassel's experiences a hoax. He mailed Van Tassel some fake flying saucer and occupant photographs that he had taken in his home; Van Tassel insisted immediately that the photographs were "conclusive proof" and used them to bolster his own contactee claims. When Van Tassel appeared on the Long John Nebel show, St. Germain also appeared unannounced and asked Van Tassel about the photographs. Van Tassel insisted on their authenticity and St. Germain took the opportunity to expose the hoax, thereby putting Van Tassel in an indefensible position.<sup>80</sup> Daniel Fry, stung by charges that he had fabricated his

story, offered to take a lie detector test. He failed it. He later claimed that the test was rigged against him.<sup>81</sup> Eventually many minor figures dropped out of the flying saucer world and some were imprisoned for fraud. Space ride claimants Rheinholdt Schmidt and Otis T. Carr received prison sentences when convicted of bilking people out of thousands of dollars to develop a flying saucer or to mine for "free energy crystals."<sup>82</sup>

In spite of the exposés, Angelucci, Adamski, Fry, and Bethurum steadfastly refused to recant no matter what evidence their critics used against them. The contactee clubs thrived during the 1950s, even though their numbers decreased by the late 1950s and early 1960s and the minor figures faded. The contactees' influence on the public and press hampered serious UFO researchers' efforts to "legitimize" the subject. The UFO phenomenon had always encountered ridicule, such that many reputable individuals were afraid to report sightings and scientists refused to view the subject seriously. Indeed, ridicule was probably the most decisive factor that prevented professional people and the public from treating the subject seriously. The contactees' emergence and their popularity and publicity succeeded in entrenching even deeper the ridicule factor in the "public imagination." From the mid-1950s to 1972, people with little knowledge of the phenomenon constantly confused the "lunatic fringe" with serious UFO investigators and researchers. Civilian Saucer Intelligence of New York in its newsletter bemoaned the fact that contactees received so much publicity in the news media. This massive publicity, the article stated, "conspires to help the audacious 'contactee' on his path to fame and fortune--and in the process, to help

wreck the reputation of flying saucers, which are more and more indissolubly linked, in the public mind, with the fantasies of these well-publicized tale-spinners."<sup>83</sup> The contactees "scared off" many people who were genuinely interested in the subject. Even Ruppelt purportedly felt the effects of the contactees. He revised his 1956 book in 1959 and totally reversed his "open minded" position; he stated positively that UFOs as a unique phenomenon did not exist and attempted to erase his identification with the phenomenon. Although no one knows his reasons for this reversal (he died of a heart attack in 1960), Keyhoe has conjectured that the contactee phenomenon resulted in pressures from Ruppelt's superiors in his civilian job at a California aircraft plant.<sup>84</sup>

Serious UFO researchers dismissed the people who believed the contactee stories (contactee-followers) as psychologically-disturbed "innocents" with a "will to believe" or, simply, "the lunatic fringe." The problem was more complex than this. It involved a logical belief system that evolved in contactee-follower thinking and acted as a "buffer" to outside attacks on them. As such, it is necessary to separate the contactees from their followers. Contactee-followers believed, as did "legitimate" UFO investigators and researchers, that flying saucers (UFOs) existed. The difference between the two groups was the reasoning that followed the belief. Most serious UFO investigators either refused to speculate on the origin of the objects or believed that the extraterrestrial hypothesis best explained the "evidence." They were split over whether to accept "reputable" witness claims of occupant sightings as part of the evidence, and many were hostile to any claims of communication. When a contactee claimed direct social intercourse with an

alien and had no "reasonable" evidence to back up even the fact that he had sighted a UFO, most serious UFO investigators denied the claim as a fabrication. The contactee-followers, on the other hand, were not so concerned with the "evidence." Believing the saucers existed and, from available reports, were products of an extraterrestrial intelligence with a highly advanced technology, the contactee-followers accepted contactee claims based on the contactees' "sincerity." They did not ask for "evidence." Moreover, already assuming that the aliens could routinely explore space, the contactee-followers logically accepted the notion that the aliens must have overcome the problems of advanced technology (pollution, waste, and destructive weapons). And if their technological capabilities had not destroyed them through war, it was probably because they desired to preserve life and were able to do so. Hence, the aliens had a moral sense. Therefore, when a contactee sincerely said that he met a moral, benevolent, technologically-advanced space person from a utopian world who wanted to help save Earth, the contactee-followers' logic dictated that the contactee was telling the truth. The key here is the "sincerity" of the contactees; all the major ones seemed to have the required amount. Serious investigators were always struck by this sincerity and how people seemed to "want" to believe them.

The contactee-followers, then, based their belief on their own logical system. They did not ask "What are they?" or "Are they here?" but "Why are they here?" They went past the "accepted" thought of serious UFO investigators and directly dealt with the implications of extraterrestrial intervention in human affairs. John Godwin, in Occult America, equated the contactee-followers with the New Guinea Cargo Cultists.<sup>85</sup>

This was perhaps unfair. The contactees did not regard the space people as deities. They were always careful to say that the space people had advanced to their high level only with God's help. The aliens' "religion" was compatible with Christianity. Believers did not have to respect and admire atheists. The contactees characterized themselves as "messengers" and did not insist that they were deities (although they came close to this position by equating their mission with Jesus' mission).

Robert Ellwood, a religion scholar, suggested that the role of "messenger" placed the contactee in the shaman tradition.<sup>86</sup> This argument has merit. The shaman is a man in special communication with the spirit world, fighting evil spirits for the good of the community. He acquires his role either through heredity or a sudden, unexpected vision, trance, or seizure.<sup>87</sup> If the contactees did have a shaman role, then the contactee groups could be "sects." Most groups possessed a body of writings or teachings and a dogma to guide the members' thought and behavior. Other scholars have not been so generous in their appraisal of the contactee-followers. Because of the religious and sensational aspects of contactee thought, some academicians have characterized the contactee-followers as "insane" or "lunatics." H. Taylor Buckner, a Berkeley sociologist, observed that the typical club members were poorly-educated, elderly, widowed or single women with physical and mental infirmities, older infirm men, and younger "schizophrenics."<sup>88</sup> Although such people most probably belonged to these clubs, they were not the only members. People of all ages, classes, and, to a lesser degree, educational backgrounds, belonged. For instance, Festinger's group, discussed in When Prophecy Fails, consisted mainly of young and educated

people.<sup>89</sup> Basically, though, contactee-followers were gullible people who, through lack of adequate factual information about the UFO phenomenon, formulated a belief system that easily incorporated the contactees' claims as fact.

Like the contactees, the Hollywood motion picture industry moved in early to capitalize on public interest in UFOs. The first films with flying saucer themes predated contactee literature by two years, perhaps because the industry was quicker to realize the market potential of the flying saucer theme. The subject of flying saucers was ideally suited for the movies. Using spectacular special effects, a film maker could exploit the sensational implications of the extraterrestrial hypothesis. Both the movies and the contactees dwelled on the fantasy aspects of UFOs. But whereas the contactees pictured the extraterrestrials as basically beneficent but with a potential for hostility, Hollywood portrayed the space people as both beneficent and hostile, with an emphasis on the latter. For most motion pictures about flying saucers, the destructive potential of hostile beings from an advanced extraterrestrial civilization was a standard theme.<sup>90</sup>

The first and perhaps best film with a flying saucer motif was Robert Wise's The Day the Earth Stood Still.<sup>91</sup> Released in 1951, it contained most elements of later contactee literature. A handsome benevolent being from a utopian planet landed his saucer on the White House lawn and brought the message that atomic testing was harming other planets. The alien was semi-immortal; his life span, which only God could end, could be hundreds of years long. The Earth people reacted with hostility and attempted to destroy him. But he escaped, mingled

with the populace, and succeeded in delivering his message to Earth's major scientists. The film brought together the themes of: the alien-as-beneficent, hostile Earth people, the dangers of the atomic bomb, the alien's ability to walk on Earth incognito, and immortality. But the film left out the "messenger"--the contactee. Because the themes in the film were so much like later contactee literature, it is possible that some contactees may have drawn upon the film as a source for their ideas.

The 1951 Howard Hawks film, The Thing, was the first film to present the extraterrestrials-as-hostile theme. In it an alien crashed in a flying saucer and brought havoc to a group of scientists who tried to capture him. The movie portrayed the alien as intelligent but bent on purposeless, irrational destruction. The alien strongly resembled Frankenstein. In the end, Earth people destroyed the alien and the movie avoided the problem of the alien's origin and his purpose on Earth. Some of the other characters in the movie reflected popular thought about the Air Force's UFO investigation in 1951 by poking fun at the Project Grudge report, which stated that all UFO sightings were mistakes. After Earth people confirmed the existence of the downed flying saucer, they read portions of the Grudge report aloud amidst general hilarity and ridicule.

The Red Planet Mars (1952) did not picture a flying saucer but did portray Martians who could communicate with Earth through radio signals, à la George Hunt Williamson. In It Came From Outer Space (1953) extraterrestrials accidentally crashed on Earth and tried to repair their craft when hostile Earth people confronted them. The extraterrestrials managed

to escape before they were hurt. Only one Earth person in the town tried to keep the townspeople from destroying the aliens. Although not a contactee, this man-hero interceded on the aliens' behalf to give them time to repair their craft. The War of the Worlds (1953) featured hostile extraterrestrials who attempted to destroy Earth but met defeat at the hands of bacteria in Earth's atmosphere. The idea that a small group of extraterrestrials wanted to colonize Earth was the central theme in This Island Earth (1955). A benevolent alien with a moral sense believed that the colonization plan was "wrong" and saved Earth by killing his fellow aliens and then committing suicide. Invasion of the Saucer Men (1957) parodied other saucer films. It featured a "humorous" account of extraterrestrials who overtook people by injecting alcohol into their veins and making them drunk. The aliens "melted" when lights shone on them.

Even Keyhoe's book, Flying Saucers From Outer Space, underwent the Hollywood treatment and became a standard science fiction film, Earth Versus the Flying Saucers (1956). It did accurately portray UFO shapes and maneuvers based on actual witness reports. But the aliens in it were hostile and addicted to blowing up Earth rockets as they were sent aloft. The aliens wanted to subjugate Earth and went on a destructive rampage against the earthlings and their cities. The hero-scientist invented a special antimagnetic weapon with which he finally destroyed the aliens. The film's producers persuaded Keyhoe to sell them the rights to his book by telling him that they were making a documentary on UFOs. When the feature came out, Keyhoe was angry; he refused to make personal appearances for the film and tried unsuccessfully to have his name removed from the credits.<sup>92</sup>

The rise of the contactees and of flying saucer movies came at the same time as the Air Force's new policy on reducing UFO reports. The Air Force's increased secrecy coupled with contactee publicity fed the UFO controversy. The public was confused. On the one hand, it heard about the alleged Air Force "cover up" and, on the other hand, it read about UFO sightings in the press and either heard about or read Keyhoe's books. In the resulting confusion it tended to equate Keyhoe with the contactees, which hindered Keyhoe's determined fight to bring "respectability" to a systematic study of the UFO phenomenon.

Moreover, the contactees, their followers, and Hollywood movies in the mid-1950s hardened the aura of illegitimacy surrounding the UFO phenomenon. While the contactees and the movie industry gave the UFO phenomenon publicity that the Air Force wanted to avoid, they also--by focusing on the sensational and fantastic--lent credence to the Air Force position that reports of unique aerial objects of possible extraterrestrial origin were groundless. At the least, the movies and contactees created a misleading impression about the nature of the phenomenon. Correcting this impression occupied much of the energy of Keyhoe and other serious investigators during the 1950s. Keyhoe's attempts to disassociate legitimate UFO investigators from contactees and their followers complicated his continuing fight with the Air Force. The skirmishes continued in the 1950s with both sides using new resources and reinforcements to try to "win" the battle.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>For a discussion of "occupant" reports, see: Coral and Jim Lorenzen, Flying Saucer Occupants (New York: Signet, 1967), passim; J. Allen Hynek, The UFO Experience: A Scientific Inquiry (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1972), passim.

<sup>2</sup>Jung's psychoanalytic description of a flying saucer sighting pertains to these individuals. See Carl G. Jung, Flying Saucers; A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Sky, trans. R. F. C. Hull (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1959; Signet, 1969).

<sup>3</sup>Paris Flammonde, The Age of Flying Saucers (New York: Hawthorn, 1971), p. 53. See also Bryant and Helen Reeve, Flying Saucer Pilgrimage (Amherst, Wis.: Amherst Press, 1957), for a discussion of the contactees' personalities.

<sup>4</sup>Flammonde, p. 54.

<sup>5</sup>Desmond Leslie and George Adamski, Flying Saucers Have Landed (London: Werner Laurie, 1953), pp. 172-173.

<sup>6</sup>Leslie and Adamski, p. 205.

<sup>7</sup>George Adamski, Inside the Spaceships (New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1955); the paperback edition is Inside the Flying Saucers (New York: Paperback Lib., 1967), pp. 78, 95, 104-105, 123, 157, 179. All subsequent references are to the paperback edition.

<sup>8</sup>Truman Bethurum, Aboard A Flying Saucer (Los Angeles: De Vorss, 1954), p. 143.

<sup>9</sup>Bethurum, p. 123.

<sup>10</sup>Bethurum, p. 145.

<sup>11</sup>Bethurum, pp. 25-26.

<sup>12</sup>Daniel Fry, The White Sands Incident (Los Angeles: New Age Publishing Co., 1954). One year later Fry wrote Alan's Message to Men of Earth (Los Angeles: New Age Publishing Co., 1955). Both books were combined in The White Sands Incident (Louisville, Ky.: Best Books, 1966), to which the notes in this chapter refer.

- <sup>13</sup>Fry, p. 19.
- <sup>14</sup>Fry, pp. 20-21.
- <sup>15</sup>Fry, p. 67.
- <sup>16</sup>Fry, p. 70.
- <sup>17</sup>Fry, pp. 90-92.
- <sup>18</sup>Orfeo M. Angelucci, The Secret of the Saucers (Amherst, Wis.: Amherst Press, 1955), p. 113. For an extensive psychoanalytic study of this book, see Jung, pp. 119-127.
- <sup>19</sup>Angelucci, pp. 33-36.
- <sup>20</sup>Angelucci, pp. 76-78. Angelucci met both Bethurum and Adamski.
- <sup>21</sup>Angelucci, p. 121.
- <sup>22</sup>Angelucci, pp. 138-140.
- <sup>23</sup>Howard Menger, From Outer Space to You (Clarksburg, W.Va.: Saucerian Books, 1959). The paperback is From Outer Space (New York: Pyramid, 1967), pp. 34-38. All notes refer to the paperback edition.
- <sup>24</sup>Menger, p. 149.
- <sup>25</sup>Menger, pp. 119-124.
- <sup>26</sup>Menger, p. 127.
- <sup>27</sup>Bethurum, p. 141.
- <sup>28</sup>Angelucci, p. 106.
- <sup>29</sup>Angelucci, p. 31.
- <sup>30</sup>Adamski, p. 78.
- <sup>31</sup>Angelucci, p. 130.
- <sup>32</sup>Leslie and Adamski, p. 202.
- <sup>33</sup>Fry, p. 71.
- <sup>34</sup>Menger, p. 155.
- <sup>35</sup>Adamski, p. 75.
- <sup>36</sup>Bethurum, p. 103.

- <sup>37</sup>Fry, p. 26.
- <sup>38</sup>Fry, p. 46.
- <sup>39</sup>Angelucci, p. 9.
- <sup>40</sup>Menger, p. 158.
- <sup>41</sup>Adamski, p. 73.
- <sup>42</sup>Bethurum, p. 75.
- <sup>43</sup>Fry, p. 67.
- <sup>44</sup>Angelucci, pp. 46, 110.
- <sup>45</sup>Menger, pp. 23, 41, 63.
- <sup>46</sup>Edward J. Ruppelt, The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1956). In 1959 Doubleday published a revision of this book which included three additional chapters and a section on contactees (p. 263); however, the revision does not have the word "revision" on it and carries the 1956 date.
- <sup>47</sup>Bethurum, pp. 120-125.
- <sup>48</sup>Menger, p. 113.
- <sup>49</sup>Menger, p. 132.
- <sup>50</sup>Menger, pp. 172-175. See also Flammonde, pp. 94-100.
- <sup>51</sup>Leslie and Adamski, pp. 177, 183; Bethurum, p. 10.
- <sup>52</sup>Angelucci, pp. 74, 26.
- <sup>53</sup>Flammonde, pp. 87-88, 211; Civilian Saucer Investigations of New York, CSI Newsletter, 15 July 1959, p. 11.
- <sup>54</sup>George Van Tassel, I Rode A Flying Saucer (The Author, 1952); George Van Tassel, The Council of Seven Lights (Los Angeles: De Vorss, 1958).
- <sup>55</sup>George Hunt Williamson and Alfred C. Bailey, The Saucers Speak (Los Angeles: New Age Publishing Co., 1954).
- <sup>56</sup>Flammonde, pp. 179-180.
- <sup>57</sup>Nexus, II (May 1955), 9. For additional descriptions of some of these minor figures, see: Flammonde, passim; John Nebel, The Way Out World (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1961; New York: Lancer, 1962); John Nebel, The Psychic World Around Us (New York: Hawthorn, 1969; New York: Signet, 1970).

<sup>58</sup>CSI Newsletter, 15 December 1956, p. 8.

<sup>59</sup>CSI Newsletter, 15 July 1959, pp. 5-8; see also Flammonde, pp. 128-131.

<sup>60</sup>Thy Kingdom Come became AFSCA World Report (1959-1961), then UFO International (1962-1965), and then Flying Saucers International (1966-1972).

<sup>61</sup>John Godwin, Occult America (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972), p. 147.

<sup>62</sup>James Moseley's reports on the Giant Rock conventions are in: Nexus, II (May 1955), 9; Saucer News, VII (September 1960), 3-9; Saucer News, VIII (December 1961), 12-13; Saucers, Space and Science, LX (1971), 7-8.

<sup>63</sup>James Moseley, "Non-Scheduled Newsletter No. 11," Saucer News (10 September 1960), 1. See also Saucer News, VII (September 1960), 3-9.

<sup>64</sup>"AMFSCA Souvenir Program," Thy Kingdom Come (May-June 1959), 2-3.

<sup>65</sup>James Moseley, "Recent News Stories," Saucer News, VI (December-January 1958), 13-14.

<sup>66</sup>CSI Newsletter, 15 July 1959, p. 11.

<sup>67</sup>Flammonde, passim; Nebel, The Way Out World, passim.

<sup>68</sup>Letter from Keyhoe to Lorenzen, 30 March 1954 (in the files of the Aerial Phenomena Research Organization, Tucson, Arizona, to which I hereafter refer as APRO).

<sup>69</sup>Letter from Keyhoe to Lorenzen, 30 March 1954 (APRO).

<sup>70</sup>For an index of some of these clubs and their locations, see Thy Kingdom Come (April-May 1957), 13-15 (published by the Los Angeles Interplanetary Study Groups, later called the Amalgamated Flying Saucer Clubs of America).

<sup>71</sup>Flammonde, p. 67.

<sup>72</sup>The Flying Saucer Review (official publication of the Space Observers League, Seattle, Washington), see particularly, I (October 1955), II (February 1956), II (April 1956), II (June 1956), II (August 1956).

<sup>73</sup>The Spacecrafter, III (January-March 1960), 3.

<sup>74</sup>UFORUM, I (February-March 1957), 4-5; CSI Newsletter, 1 May 1957, pp. 1-2.

<sup>75</sup>Nexus (January 1955, March 1955, May 1955); Saucer News, II (June-July 1955), IV (February-March 1957), "Confidential Newsletter No. 4" (October 1957), "Confidential Newsletter No. 8" (August 1958), VI (December-January 1958-1959), VI (February-March 1959), VII (September 1960), "Non-Scheduled Newsletter No. 11" (10 September 1960), VIII (December 1961), XI (March 1964), XIII (March 1966).

<sup>76</sup>Letter from Keyhoe to Lorenzen, 22 September 1954 (APRO).

<sup>77</sup>Letter from Keyhoe to Lorenzen, 2 July 1954 (APRO).

<sup>78</sup>See 'Special Adamski Exposé Issue,' Saucer News (October 1957).

<sup>79</sup>James Moseley, "Strange New Ideas From Howard Menger," Saucer News (Non-Scheduled Newsletter No. 26 [25 January 1966]), 1.

<sup>80</sup>An account of this episode can be found in CSI Newsletter, 1 May 1957, pp. 9-10.

<sup>81</sup>Ruppelt (1959 revision), p. 268.

<sup>82</sup>Saucer News (December 1961), 15.

<sup>83</sup>CSI Newsletter, 1 November 1957, p. 16.

<sup>84</sup>Ruppelt (1959 revision), pp. 270-271; Letter from Keyhoe to Lorenzen, 17 July 1958 (APRO).

<sup>85</sup>Godwin, p. 144.

<sup>86</sup>Robert Ellwood, Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973), pp. 132-133.

<sup>87</sup>Ellwood, pp. 11-19.

<sup>88</sup>H. Taylor Buckner, "Flying Saucers are For People," Trans-Action, III (May-June 1966), 10-13; Buckner, "The Flying Saucerians: An Open Door Cult," in Marcello Truzzi, ed., Sociology and Everyday Life (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp. 223-230.

<sup>89</sup>Leon Festinger, When Prophecy Fails (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1956), passim.

<sup>90</sup>No good analysis of science fiction movies exists. However, three fair attempts are: John Baxter, Science Fiction in the Cinema (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1970); Dennis Gifford, Science Fiction Film (London: Dutton, 1969); Susan Sontag, "The Imagination of Disaster," Against Interpretation (New York: Dell, Laurel ed. 1969), pp. 212-228.

<sup>91</sup>The Day the Earth Stood Still, It Came From Outer Space, and This Island Earth are at the Library of Congress. The Thing is at the State Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

<sup>92</sup>Letter from Keyhoe to Lorenzen, 3 October 1956 (APRO).

## CHAPTER VI

## 1954 TO 1958: CONTINUED SKIRMISHES AND THE RISE OF NICAP

After the contactee and civilian UFO organizations entered the UFO controversy, they engaged in a series of "skirmishes" with the Air Force over its UFO program. During the period 1954 to 1958, the civilian UFO groups found a leader in the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP). The Air Force reorganized its investigative and public relations systems. Both parties formulated their positions on the issues of Air Force secrecy, congressional investigations, and publicity about UFOs.

The "skirmishes" centered around the Air Force's position as "keeper of the knowledge." It was the only agency that continually collected, investigated, and analyzed sighting reports. The Air Force had the most comprehensive data available. The civilian UFO organizations, following Keyhoe's lead, criticized it for a conspiracy of silence to prevent panic among the people. They demanded that the Air Force make its files public. But the Air Force refused, because of the Robertson Panel's recommendations and because the files contained classified intelligence information. By continually reacting to Air Force pronouncements, regulations, and policies, the civilian groups made the Air Force the "prime mover" in the controversy and relinquished some of their own autonomy. Yet the Air Force stimulated this reaction, both by denying the potential significance of the UFO phenomenon and by questioning the civilian groups' intentions.

The Air Force's secrecy policies made UFO proponents somewhat "paranoid." Civilian UFO investigators James Moseley and Leon Davidson thought that UFOs were actually American secret weapons. Moseley said that the Air Force used them to "absorb excess radioactivity" in the atmosphere;<sup>1</sup> and Davidson, while originally thinking they were secret weapons, later developed the theory that UFOs were a nonexistent CIA "front." The CIA, Davidson explained, had maneuvered or created all UFO club activity, contactees, books, and so on, to confound the Russians about our technological capabilities.<sup>2</sup> The clearest example of extrapolating sinister ideas from noninformation was Keyhoe's theory that the top levels of government were all "in" on the flying saucer "conspiracy": "Actually, the Air Force is not the only agency involved; the CIA, National Security Council, FBI, Civil Defense, all are tied in at top levels. The White House, of course, will have the final word as to what people are to be told, and when."<sup>3</sup> Keyhoe also believed that the Air Force conspired against him personally. He wrote Coral Lorenzen, head of the Aerial Phenomena Research Organization, in August and September of 1954, that it might try to "muzzle" him by recalling him to active Marine duty and putting him under military restrictions. He thought the Air Force might try to silence Coral Lorenzen as well and devised a written signal for her to use in case this happened.<sup>4</sup>

In this atmosphere of suspicion and near-paranoia, the Air Force moved to counter the criticism by reorganizing its UFO program to minimize public interest and to implement the Robertson Panel recommendations. In March 1954 it appointed Captain Charles Hardin to succeed Airman First Class Max Futch as head of Blue Book. And because Hardin's two-man staff

could not investigate the large number of UFO reports coming into ATIC, the Air Force transferred all UFO field investigating duties to the 4602nd Air Intelligence Service Squadron, a division of the Air Defense Command.<sup>5</sup> Actually, Ruppelt began this transfer during his last months as head of Blue Book, but his purpose was to supplement and expand Blue Book's investigative capabilities, not abolish them.<sup>6</sup> The transfer meant that Blue Book would analyze and evaluate the data, only making special field investigations when ATIC felt they were important enough.

The first activity in the reorganization was to teach the 4602nd personnel, who were trained only to identify planes, how to categorize other aerial objects and how to identify them immediately.<sup>7</sup> Hynek, Hardin, and members of the 4602nd devised a Standard Operating Procedure Manual for quick, easy identifications, which the Air Force encouraged.<sup>8</sup> The manual explained some of the problems the field investigators were likely to encounter and became the standard guide for Air Force field investigations.<sup>9</sup> With strategically placed personnel using the manual to make immediate identifications, the Air Force claimed that its investigating capabilities were more "scientific"; the more accurate information coming into ATIC was reducing substantially the number of unknowns. If a 4602nd investigator failed to make an identification, the Air Force placed most such reports in the "insufficient data" category, thereby lowering the number of unknowns even more.<sup>10</sup> Using the data gathered through this new procedure, the Air Force stepped up its public relations campaign to emphasize that the UFO program was not secret and that UFOs were not unusual. The Air Force explained that the 20 percent to 30 percent unknown rate for the previous 1947 to 1952 period was due

only to inadequate data and poor reporting and cited the current (1954) less than 10 percent unknown rate as evidence for this explanation.<sup>11</sup>

But no matter what statistics the Air Force gave, it could not convince UFO proponents to accept statements about its objectivity and openness at face value. The Air Force refused to declassify its sighting reports and thus found itself in a dilemma; the same policies it defended handicapped its public relations efforts. By refuting the secrecy charges while, at the same time, refusing to declassify the sighting reports, the Air Force incurred even greater criticism and appeared to be "covering up" as the critics charged. Furthermore, in its zeal to dispel the notion that it had ever considered seriously the extraterrestrial hypothesis, the Air Force denied that certain essential documents existed and that pivotal events had taken place. Spokesmen denied the existence of General Twining's 1947 letter, which stated that the objects were "real" and which was the impetus for the UFO program. They denied that the 1948 Estimate of the Situation was an actual document. They denied that Dewey Fournet had conducted a UFO maneuvers study in 1952. And they denied that the Robertson Panel ever had met.<sup>12</sup> Privately, the Air Force contended that declassification of its UFO files could lead to another saucer "scare"; publicly, it claimed that its classification policies were necessary to protect witnesses' names and the capabilities of classified electronic equipment which might have been involved in investigating a sighting.<sup>13</sup>

Mass media coverage in 1954 about UFOs boosted the Air Force's public relations campaign. Charlotte Knight, in Collier's, claimed that virtually all UFO sightings were Air Force high altitude balloons.<sup>14</sup>

Siegfried Mandel lumped Adamski and Keyhoe together when he reviewed some recent books on UFOs for the Saturday Review. Mandel said that these two writers exploited the anxieties of the times "to create infantile illusions, fears, and hopes ranging from facile solutions to world conflicts to the saucers-will-get-you bugaboo." He hoped that readers "with a normal degree of objectivity" realized that UFOs were "auto-suggestive myths." When extraterrestrial visitors arrived, Mandel stated positively, they would approach "reliable" people and "present unmistakable credentials of their galactic origin." He recommended Menzel's book as a "potent antidote" to the other writers.<sup>15</sup> Wartime head of the German V-2 rocket development, Dr. Walter Dornberger, told a Newsweek reporter that UFOs were only violent eddies of air that spun so fast their atoms became unstable and emitted light; this accounted for 98 percent to 99 percent of all sightings and the rest were natural phenomena. "No one is going to convince me of visitors from space," Dornberger said, "until they bring in one of those little guys and sit him on my desk."<sup>16</sup> Menzel reiterated his feelings at the International Astronomical Union in Dublin, Ireland; when some of the astronomers began to discuss UFOs, Menzel exclaimed that "such fantastic nonsense has no part in business dealt with on such a high scientific level as at these meeting."<sup>17</sup> Even President Eisenhower seemed to help the Air Force's public relations endeavors. He stated at a news conference that a trusted Air Force official had told him the notion that UFOs came "from any outside planet or any other place" was "completely inaccurate."<sup>18</sup> A New York Times reporter interviewed an Air Force spokesman after Eisenhower's comment and said that "If the Air Force were not tactful it might scoff at the whole

business publicly." Later, after asking Air Force headquarters about UFOs, the same reporter explained that "talk about flying saucers is one of those delusions that from time to time sweep the popular mind, especially in times of stress."<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile, the Air Force made more direct "debunking" efforts to prevent a saucer scare. An article in the March 1954 issue of American Aviation said that the Pentagon "definitely attributes" the latest wave of UFO sightings to Keyhoe's Flying Saucers From Outer Space which, the article explained, gained notoriety by affecting an official air with the help of an Air Force "underling" (Al Chop) who was no longer with the service.<sup>20</sup>

Keyhoe continued his counterattack against the Air Force in his third book, The Flying Saucer Conspiracy, published in 1955. In it he again put forth his conspiracy-of-silence theory but, this time, had new facts to back it up: the issuance of Air Force Regulation 200-2, part of which prohibited the release of UFO reports to the public, and of Joint-Army-Navy Air Force-Publication (JANAP) 146, which made public disclosure of a UFO sighting described in the JANAP form a criminal offense; the Air Force's insistence on including disclaimers in Keyhoe's Look article; and the efforts to discredit him. He concluded once again that high-ranking Air Force officials knew more than they were telling and that a small group of Pentagon conspirators were directing the Air Force policy to the country's detriment. This "Silence Group" within the Pentagon, Keyhoe said, was using censorship to prevent hysteria. He realized that such action might be due to a "high motive" but warned that censorship was dangerous to democratic institutions and that the "Air Force's

insistence that it has no answer only heightens the possibility of hysteria."<sup>21</sup> To bolster his theory, he listed over 100 puzzling UFO cases and weak or ridiculous Air Force explanations of them.<sup>22</sup>

Believing that his new book would boost his cause, Keyhoe did not know that the Air Force still had an important card to play, a card which it apparently had been keeping since 1953. The "card" was Project Blue Book Special Report Number 14, the updated results of the Battelle Memorial Institute's statistical study of UFOs which Ruppelt had initiated in 1952.<sup>23</sup> Although it is not clear why the Air Force decided to release Special Report 14 at the same time that The Flying Saucer Conspiracy came out, Keyhoe's assertion that the Air Force did it to counteract his book seems consistent with the Air Force's policy of opposing any publicity that might lead to another "saucer scare."<sup>24</sup>

The report was puzzling. The purpose of the study was to determine, through statistical techniques, whether anything flying in the air "represented technological developments not known to this country."<sup>25</sup> A secondary purpose was to develop a model of a flying saucer and to find common patterns and trends in the movements of the reported objects. The researchers concluded that, as a result of incomplete data and inadequate scientific measurements, "it cannot be absolutely proven that 'flying saucers' do not exist."<sup>26</sup> They could neither devise any "verified" model of flying saucers (apparently assuming that UFOs should come in one shape) nor find any physical evidence for them. Similarly, the researchers could find no patterns or trends in sightings, although, the report said, "the inaccuracies inherent in this type of data, in addition to the incompleteness of a large proportion of the reports, may have obscured any

patterns or trends that otherwise would have been evident."<sup>27</sup> The researchers did find that the more complete the data and the "better" the report, the more likely it was that the report would remain unknown.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless--even after saying that they could not identify the unknowns--the researchers stated that "the probability that any of the UNKNOWNs considered in this study are 'flying saucers' is concluded to be extremely small, since the most complete and reliable reports from the present data, when isolated and studied, conclusively failed to reveal even a rough model, and since the data as a whole failed to reveal any marked patterns or trends." Therefore, the report's general conclusion was that "on the basis of this evaluation of the information, it is considered to be highly improbable that any of the reports of unidentified aerial objects examined in this study represent observations of technological developments outside the range of present-day scientific knowledge."<sup>29</sup>

When Secretary of the Air Force Donald Quarles released Special Report 14 on October 25, 1955, he made several statements to the press about the entire UFO issue. He said that no one had reason to believe that flying saucers had flown over the United States and that the 3 percent unknowns during 1954 were identifiable if more information were available (the latter being contrary to what the Battelle Institute found). Also, he explained that the Air Force had tested recently a new, circular, vertical take-off jet and had contracted with a Canadian firm to buy a circular flying craft known as the "AVRO." These two planes, Quarles stated, would probably cause UFO sightings in the future.<sup>30</sup> Keyhoe's reaction to this last statement was that it was calculated to deceive the public.<sup>31</sup>

The Air Force hoped the timely release of Special Report 14 would quiet the UFO controversy once and for all, especially because the report was a scientific study that found no evidence for UFOs being interplanetary objects. But instead of laying the controversy to rest, Special Report 14 created a new battlefield. Keyhoe and other civilian UFO proponents charged that the Battelle Institute had not used the "best" cases for its study and had avoided using many important cases that the Air Force listed as "unidentified" in its files. Keyhoe asserted that the "cream of the crop" reports the Battelle Institute said it used to obtain a model of a flying saucer were in reality weak cases, and that the Institute deliberately used them to convey the impression that all witnesses were seeing different phenomena. Keyhoe criticized the Institute for being biased in favor of explaining the reports and for using only a few foreign sightings and none before 1947, which intimated that the phenomenon began in 1947. Finally, Keyhoe faulted the Institute for using the statistics on unknowns to imply that only 9 percent of all sightings and 3 percent of the recent sightings were unknown; in fact, Keyhoe said, 20 percent to 30 percent of all sightings were unknown and the 3 percent was for the first three months of 1955 only.<sup>32</sup>

Ruppelt was critical of Special Report 14 as well. In a widely-quoted letter (February 1956) to UFO researcher Max Miller, Ruppelt said that the most "astounding" thing about the report was that it said all but a few UFOs were explainable. This "shocked" him because he had initiated the project and knew that the study's purpose was not to solve the overall UFO problem, as the Air Force made it out to be, but to find unknown technological developments. Moreover, Ruppelt said, "after

spending a considerable amount of money, statistical methods were no good for a study like this. They didn't prove a thing. The results were such that by interpreting them in different ways you could prove anything you wanted to. This is not a good study." Ruppelt could not understand why the Air Force had held on to the report for two years and released a 1953 study in 1955 as the "latest hot dope."<sup>33</sup>

At first Special Report 14 seemed to have the desired effect. New York Times science editor, Jonathan N. Leonard, added to the paper's ongoing hostility toward proponents of the theory that UFOs had an extra-terrestrial origin by using Special Report 14 as a basis for a scathing review of Keyhoe's The Flying Saucer Conspiracy, popular writer Harold T. Wilkens' Flying Saucers Uncensored, and Ruppelt's The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects. Leonard said all UFO proponents were cultists and that one subcult was those who believe in "heretical conspiracy in the depths of the Pentagon." Keyhoe was the chief cultist who wished to become a martyr to the cause. Ruppelt's book was the "longest and dullest" of the three and, while more sensible, still well within the cultist range. But, explained Leonard, while these books were in preparation "the Air Force released the results of a massive, intelligent, painstaking and detailed analysis of all flying saucer reports," using "excellent scientists" with "elaborate apparatus." Leonard favorably outlined Special Report 14's conclusions and called it a "cruel blockbuster" for Ruppelt and other "cultists."<sup>34</sup> Captain Hardin, commenting happily on the review, reported that "It would appear from this review that the downgrading and subsequent release of Special Report 14 is serving well the purpose for which it was intended."<sup>35</sup>

In spite of Hardin's optimism, though, the criticism of Special Report 14 was so intense that the Air Force and Blue Book became more sensitive than ever, and the controversy did not subside. Instead, the Air Force became embroiled in a protracted fight about making the report available to the public. Perhaps uneasy about the criticisms and inadequacies, the Air Force had printed only 100 copies for in-house distribution, particularly for every major public information officer in the country.<sup>36</sup> But pressure from UFO researchers persuaded California Representative John E. Moss of the House Subcommittee on Government Information to force the Air Force to print and distribute more copies.<sup>37</sup>

By 1956, and despite its controversial nature, Special Report 14 became the cornerstone of the Air Force's position on UFOs. This position, that the Air Force had "scientifically" studied UFOs and found no evidence for their existence as a unique phenomenon, was not limited to public pronouncements and press releases; it prevailed within the Air Force staff as well. Although Keyhoe charged that the Air Force stifled interest in UFOs, no information exists to indicate that any member of Project Blue Book or ATIC ever thought UFOs were anything other than an "explainable" phenomenon. This attitude is best illustrated in a briefing that Captain George T. Gregory, who became head of Blue Book when Captain Hardin transferred in April 1956, gave to members of the Air Intelligence Training School. Gregory, a zealous UFO debunker, told the staff that the 1952 sightings were definitely due to publicity about the subject and that the growing number of UFO clubs, books, and articles criticizing the Air Force was contributing to a new surge of reports. According to Gregory, in 1952 the Air Force managed to rise above the hysteria of the times to

investigate UFO reports "quietly, solemnly and seriously." He freely used Hynek's name to demonstrate the caliber of scientists who worked on the problem and found nothing unique in the atmosphere. Gregory enumerated all the latest techniques that the Air Force used to study the phenomenon, such as the Videon diffraction grid and the radarscope camera. But he neither explained that the Air Force had installed the Videon diffraction grids even though they had failed nor that the radarscope plan had been unsatisfactory. To end the briefing, Gregory distributed copies of Special Report 14, explaining that it was the results from "a large panel of distinguished scientists" who had intensively studied and analyzed the phenomenon. Special Report 14 proved, said Gregory, that there was a "Total lack of evidence" to demonstrate that the objects were hostile, interplanetary spaceships, that they represented technological development not known in this country, or that they were a threat to the United States.<sup>38</sup>

By 1956 almost all former ATIC and Blue Book personnel had left the project. Gregory and the new officers may not have been aware of the UFO program's previous history. It is clear that, from 1956 to 1969, no one within ATIC seriously questioned the Air Force's UFO investigative or analytical methods. Even Hynek, with his vague misgivings, was a willing participant in the Air Force's plan to rid itself of the UFO problem. Hynek described the characteristic style of thinking in the Air Force around 1956 as being: "It can't be, therefore it isn't."<sup>39</sup> Given this philosophy, Gregory and the other staff people were not concerned with verifying the facts or validating their methods and findings; UFOs were nonsense, and any reputable scientific study would most certainly conclude the same thing.

Yet, despite such seeming self-assurance, Air Force personnel still felt anxious about the steady stream of UFO publicity emanating from private sources. Perhaps the most serious "threat" to the Air Force in 1956 was the release of Clarence Greene's semidocumentary motion picture, UFOs. Greene had received the technical assistance of Chop, Fournet, and Ruppelt on the film and also had obtained copies of the recently-declassified Great Falls (Montana) and Tremonton (Utah) UFO films of supposed UFOs in flight. Greene's movie featured Los Angeles journalist Tom Powers in the starring role as Al Chop; other actors portrayed Ruppelt, Fournet, and General Garland. Greene included in the film interviews with Nicholas Mariana and Delbert C. Newhouse (the two men who had taken the UFO films), a portion of the Samford news conference, and dramatic reenactments of the Mantell incident and the Washington, D.C., sightings.<sup>40</sup> Such publicity posed a severe threat to Captain Gregory and the Air Force, which mobilized its resources. Gregory kept a file of all the film's reviews, notifications, and advertisements, carefully underlining every statement that might cause problems for the Air Force or generate interest in UFOs. From Richard Dyer McCann's review in the Christian Science Monitor, Gregory singled out the statement, "It will almost certainly stir up a storm of public controversy," and added the marginal note, "This is something that neither PIO [Office of Public Information] or ATIC would like to undergo again!"<sup>41</sup> Gregory summed up the Air Force's attitude toward the film by using the phrase from the review: "This film may stir up a storm of public controversy similar to that which USAF was subjected to in 1952 with regard to UFOs as a result of the unwarranted sensationalism generated by so-called

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'UFO experts,' writers, and publishers."<sup>42</sup> In addition to keeping files, ATIC asked Hynek and Air Force officers to review the film before its release, and asked photo experts to compare copies of the Mariana and Newhouse films with the excerpts shown in the movie. ATIC Chief Scientist A. Francis Arcier met with agency officials to discuss a course of action, which was to prepare a case file giving the official Air Force explanation for every sighting portrayed in the film. And, finally, ATIC devised a standard response to all inquiries about the film; the response referred the writer to Special Report 14.<sup>43</sup>

When the film came out in May of 1956 it did not provoke the "storm of controversy" that the Air Force thought it would. The film was successful, but the Air Force's fears were unfounded. Nonetheless, the Air Force still had reason to believe that its UFO "debunking" campaign was inadequate, for the number of sighting reports increased. In the peak sighting year, 1952, ATIC received 1501 reports. In the following three years, 1953, 1954, 1955, it received between 400 and 500 annually. Then in 1956 it received 778 reports.<sup>44</sup> This increase produced further public interest in the subject, and the discrepancy among the sightings, Air Force pronouncements, Keyhoe's theories, and the public perceptions of the problem came to a head in 1956 with the formation of the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP).

Dissatisfied with Air Force policies, a group of people interested in discovering the origin of UFOs met in October 1956 to organize the Flying Saucer Discussion Group. They proposed to investigate UFOs and the possibility of space flight. Club member and space propulsion researcher T. Townshend Brown, the club's first director, wanted scientists and

other influential citizens to back the club. With the help of Keyhoe, Brown appointed to the Board of Governors a retired Army Brigadier General, two physicists, two ministers, and two businessmen, among others. The most prestigious man on the board was missile pioneer and former head of the Navy's guided missile program, retired Rear Admiral Delmer S. Fahrney. Brown changed the club's name to the more professional-sounding National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena and had the organization incorporated on October 24, 1956.<sup>45</sup> A major problem confronting the new organization was to keep the "crack pots" out and to become "respectable" enough to draw professional people. Keyhoe purposely kept in the background, not wanting reporters to "Jump on it [NICAP] and picture it as a Keyhoe-inspired deal."<sup>46</sup>

From the beginning Brown ran into trouble. He had estimated that \$85,000 a year would cover salaries and expenses and set the membership fees at from \$15.00 for regular members to \$1000 for "founders." Expenses mounted but the expected funds did not materialize; by the end of 1956, when only two months old, the fledgling organization hovered on the brink of bankruptcy.<sup>47</sup> Tensions between Keyhoe and Brown over Brown's financial policies peaked in January 1957 at a climactic membership meeting. Keyhoe attended and seemed content with watching and listening only. But when Brown decided to place his own name in nomination for the Chairman of the Board of Governors, a position he wanted in addition to being director, Keyhoe was unable to contain himself. He accused Brown of mismanaging the funds and steering the organization on too radical a course (he referred to Brown's antigravity propulsion theories). A shouting match ensued and Keyhoe issued an ultimatum to the board and to Brown:

either Brown resigned from NICAP or Keyhoe would personally advise Admiral Fahrney and other board members to resign. Faced with this ultimatum, the board capitulated; the next day it forced Brown to resign, elected Admiral Fahrney chairman, and appointed Keyhoe to replace Brown as the new director of NICAP.<sup>48</sup>

Keyhoe finally had an organizational tool for challenging the Air Force on a national scale. He had been formulating plans since 1954, at which time he told Coral Lorenzen that a "wide public demand" for Air Force declassification or congressional hearings on UFOs was needed to combat the top-level conspiracy. "If enough intelligent believers could get together and use all possible influence, through their congressmen, senators, and any other means at hand, it might force a quick policy change in Washington."<sup>49</sup> Keyhoe's strategy to solve the UFO problem to his satisfaction and uncover the "conspiracy" was either to force or wait for a "big breakthrough," which could take several forms: a flying saucer could land on the White House lawn, thereby putting an immediate end to the UFO controversy; a series of spectacular sightings could occur, which would create enough public pressure to force the Air Force to reveal all its findings; or rational argument could persuade the public to Keyhoe's position, giving him the leverage to force public disclosure of the Air Force's "hidden" findings. The latter method was, of course, the only way Keyhoe could control the breakthrough.

All UFO organizations drew a degree of ridicule, but NICAP tried to keep its share to a minimum. Keyhoe's position as director plus the people on the Board of Governors gave NICAP dignity and it attracted many individuals who would not have usually joined a UFO organization. Within

a few months after Keyhoe's appointment, the Board of Governors consisted of Fahrney, Vice-Admiral R. H. Hillenkoetter (former director of the CIA), Dewey Fournet, J. B. Hartranft (president of the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association), retired Rear Admiral H. B. Knowles, Army Reserve Colonel Robert B. Emerson, retired Marine Corps Lieutenant General P. A. delValle, Dr. Marcus Bach (professor of religion at Iowa State University), Dr. Charles A. Maney (professor of physics at Defiance College in Ohio), Reverend Leon LeVan, Reverend Albert Baller, columnist Earl Douglass, and radio-TV commentator Frank Edwards.<sup>50</sup> These men gave NICAP the prestige and national outlook that no other UFO organization had. Furthermore, NICAP had a distinguished group of "special advisors": Al Chop, Captain C. S. Chiles (of the 1948 Chiles and Whitted sighting fame), Captain R. B. McLaughlin (author of the True Magazine article on tracking a UFO), Warrant Officer Delbert C. Newhouse (who took the famous Tremonton, Utah, motion picture), and Wilbert B. Smith (former head of the Canadian government's UFO project).<sup>51</sup>

Fahrney inaugurated NICAP's public role with a press conference, which the Associated Press carried nationally. He stated that neither Russia nor the United States could duplicate the UFOs' observed speeds and accelerations and that the flying objects seemed to be intelligently controlled because of "the way they change position in formations and override each other."<sup>52</sup> With over 500 newspaper articles about the press conference,<sup>53</sup> the new organization began with a burst of publicity. Meanwhile, Keyhoe's reorganizing plans advanced rapidly. He cut the membership fee to \$7.50, arranged to publish a monthly bulletin, slashed the organization's overhead, and put it on a "bare bones" financial policy

by, among other things, moving to offices with lower rent and dismissing salaried employees.<sup>54</sup> Most important, he changed the organization's emphasis. Unlike Brown, Keyhoe wanted to use NICAP as a pressure group to force congressional hearings on the Air Force's UFO program; Congress could require the Air Force to release its UFO data to the public and also prompt a fair and impartial scientific investigation. More conservative than other UFO organizations, NICAP at first avoided any claim that UFOs were extraterrestrial. By assuming that Air Force records and sighting reports would "prove" the extraterrestrial origin of UFOs, NICAP in effect dared the Air Force to make this determination. Through this stance, NICAP placed the Air Force in the position of being the Expert-in-the-Field and relinquished some of its ability to act independently of the Air Force. For nearly all of NICAP's existence, it was inextricably connected with Air Force policies and whims.

Keyhoe's main vehicle for his lobbying efforts was the organization's publication: the UFO Investigator. The first issue created much public comment because it contained a previously undisclosed radar-visual sighting that Civil Aeronautics Administration control-tower operators had made.<sup>55</sup> Each succeeding issue presented information designed to counteract Air Force claims of UFO "solutions." Before long the newsletter and Keyhoe's aggressive reorganization policies led to a considerable membership, numbering approximately 5000 by 1958.<sup>56</sup> But, regardless of the large numbers of people joining and paying \$7.50, NICAP was in a constant state of financial crisis; Keyhoe had to finance the newsletter after the first few issues and, in large part, the entire organization with his personal funds. With careful nurturing, however,

NICAP quickly assumed leadership over the scores of smaller UFO organizations spread around the country.

The only organization to "rival" it was the Aerial Phenomena Research Organization (APRO), which James and Coral Lorenzen had founded in 1952. The Lorenzens were pleased to see NICAP's formation and did all they could to help the new organization. They did not agree completely with Keyhoe's conspiracy thesis but, at least in 1957, did not argue with it. APRO was, from its inception in 1952, a small organization, content to report UFO sightings and events. It had neither the resources nor the inclination to "take on" the Air Force or Congress; it had avoided severe monetary problems and preferred to remain within its financial limits.

The Air Force looked upon the establishment of NICAP with Keyhoe at its head as particularly troublesome. The influential people on the Board of Governors did nothing to ease the Air Force's anxiety. It was distressed especially over Keyhoe's efforts to obtain congressional hearings, fearing that the publicity from such hearings would touch off another saucer "scare." Moreover, hearings would imply that the Air Force was not doing its job properly.<sup>57</sup> In the face of increased criticism from UFO proponents and the newly-formed NICAP, the Air Force expanded its rationale for keeping UFO data classified. In 1957 Major Robert Spence, deputy chief of the Operations Branch of the Public Information Service, told private researcher Max Miller that the Air Force could not give him its photographic files "without making them available to all." This was undesirable because the "man hours and cost would be exorbitant" and, more importantly, it would interfere with the Air Force's normal missions and operations.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, General Joe Kelly assured

Keyhoe in 1957 that the Air Force would not turn over its UFO files to NICAP because then it would have to do the same for the other organizations. The purpose of classifying UFO reports, Kelly said, was to "safeguard the National Security" because often a case involved a specific radar or classified weapons system.<sup>59</sup>

Concurrent with major public relations problems from NICAP, the Air Force went through another reorganization of its UFO project. In July of 1957, the Air Defense Command disbanded the 4602nd and reassigned UFO investigating duties to the 1006th Air Intelligence Service Squadron (AISS).<sup>60</sup> The Air Force took this opportunity to divide public relations responsibilities between the Office of Legislative Liaison for Congress and the Office of Public Information for the public, thereby allowing Air Force intelligence to be "completely divorced" from the public relations aspect of the controversy.<sup>61</sup> The Air Force revised AFR 200-2 to formalize the new procedures.<sup>62</sup> Also, the revised regulations recreated the system of Air Base commanders conducting initial investigations of all UFO sightings in their areas and confined ATIC's UFO responsibility to analysis and evaluation. If ATIC believed that more extensive study was required, AFR 200-2 stated, it should submit a request to have 1006th personnel conduct the investigation. At about the same time (probably February or July of 1958), the Air Force added a paragraph to AFR 200-2 stating that "Air Force activities must reduce the percentage of unidentifieds to the minimum."<sup>63</sup> It believed that reducing the number of unidentifieds would cut down on the number of new sighting reports; people would begin to understand that a "strange" something in the sky was not necessarily a spaceship and, therefore, would

not report such sightings to the Air Force. In revising the regulations, the Air Force tried to eliminate "any and all portions of [AFR 200-2] which might provoke suspicion or misinterpretation by the public."<sup>64</sup> Keyhoe, in The Flying Saucer Conspiracy, had criticized the Air Force for its secrecy policies as outlined in AFR 200-2.<sup>65</sup> Another part of the new procedures was to counter the contactees' publicity efforts; the Air Force gave the FBI names of individuals who were "illegally or deceptively bringing the subject to public attention."<sup>66</sup> These changes, the Air Force hoped, "should do much toward the relief of [Air Force Intelligence] in the UFO program."<sup>67</sup>

The change to the 1006th encountered problems immediately. Within a few months of the transfer, the Air Force reduced the funds for the 1006th, making a curtailment of its investigating functions necessary.<sup>68</sup> The 1006th remained with the UFO program until its reassignment in 1959, at which time the Air Force used the 1137th Field Activities Group stationed at Fort Belvoir, Virginia.<sup>69</sup>

The Air Force's organizational and regulation changes had no effect on the number of sighting reports coming into ATIC. Despite the campaign to downplay the subject, 1957 represented another peak year in UFO reports. Whereas ATIC recorded 778 sighting reports in 1956, it received over 1100 in 1957. The average was only about 30 sightings per month for the first six months of 1957; then the reports increased in July and August to about 70 a month, decreased slightly to 60 in September, increased to over 100 in October, and finally to over 600 for November and December together.<sup>70</sup> It seemed as if the country was experiencing another major wave of saucer sightings, approaching the scale of the 1952 "scare."

November, the month with the most reports, began with a spectacular group of sightings in Levelland, Texas.<sup>71</sup> These cases were important not only for the public impact but for illustrating the Air Force's investigatory methods. The sightings began at 11:00 p.m. on the night of November 2 and ended at 2:00 a.m. on the morning of November 3. Two witnesses were driving just north of Levelland when they saw a glowing, yellow and white, torpedo-shaped object flying toward them. As the object flew over the automobile, the car's motor and lights failed. The two witnesses left their car to view the object, and it came so close to them that they experienced "quite some heat" which forced them to "hit the ground." As the object left the area, the driver could start the car again and turn the lights on. The witnesses reported the incident to the police.<sup>72</sup>

One hour later, at midnight, a witness driving four miles east of Levelland came upon a brilliantly-glowing, egg-shaped object resting in the middle of the road. As the witness approached the object, which he thought was about 200 feet long, his car engine and lights failed. A few seconds later the object rose to a height of about 200 feet and disappeared. The witness was then able to start his car engine and the lights worked properly.<sup>73</sup> Five minutes later another witness, driving eleven miles north of Levelland, reported to police that he had come upon a 200 foot-long, glowing object sitting in the road; as he approached it, he said, his car engine failed and the lights went out; when the object rose and left the area, he could start the engine and the lights functioned normally again.<sup>74</sup> At 12:05 a.m. a nineteen year-old college freshman was driving nine miles east of Levelland when the engine and lights in his

car failed suddenly; as he got out of his car to look under the hood, he saw an egg-shaped object sitting on the ground in front of him. The object, he said, was 75 to 100 feet long, glowed white with a greenish tint, and seemed made of aluminum. Frightened, he re-entered his car and watched the object for about five minutes. Then the object "disappeared" and the witness was able to start his car again. He did not tell anyone about the incident "for fear of public ridicule." (The next day, however, his parents convinced him to call the police.)<sup>75</sup> Fifteen minutes after this last incident, another person's car stalled as it approached an object sitting on a dirt road nine miles north of Levelland. The object was glowing but, when it rose to an elevation of about 300 feet, it disappeared from sight. The witness was then able to start the automobile.<sup>76</sup>

All of these reports came into Patrolman A. J. Fowler of Levelland who was on duty that night. He sent two deputies out to investigate; they reported seeing bright lights in the sky but reported no engine problems.<sup>77</sup> Several minutes after the deputies' report, a man driving just west of Levelland saw a huge orange ball of fire coming toward him; it settled on the highway about a quarter of a mile in front of him, covering the paved portion of the road. When the witness approached the object, his car engine and lights failed. As the object rose a few minutes later, the witness was able to start his car again.<sup>78</sup> One-half hour later, a truck driver called Patrolman Fowler to report that, as he was driving northeast of Levelland, his truck engine and headlights failed when he came within 200 feet of a 200 foot-long, egg-shaped object on the ground. He said it glowed "like a neon sign." As he got out of

the truck to investigate, the object shot straight up with a roar and flew away. His truck engine and headlights worked perfectly after the encounter.<sup>79</sup> During this time other sheriff's deputies, aware of the UFO reports in the area, were looking for objects. Sheriff Clem and Deputy McCulloch, while driving four or five miles outside the city, saw a streak of light with a reddish glow about 300 to 400 yards ahead of them on the highway; it lit up the entire area in front of them.<sup>80</sup> Patrolmen Hargrove and Gavin were only a few miles behind the sheriff's car on the same road when they saw "a strange looking flash" which "appeared to be close to the ground" about a mile in front of them.<sup>81</sup> Constable Lloyd Ballen reported the last sighting of the evening; he saw an object which, he said, was traveling so fast that it looked like a flash of light moving from east to west.<sup>82</sup>

In all, twelve people claimed to have seen an object and three more to have seen an unusual flash of light during a three-hour period. All of the witnesses reported a light rain or heavy mist in the area but no storms or lightning.<sup>83</sup>

The national news wire services picked up the sightings, which made headlines around the country. Public pressure on Blue Book to investigate these incidents was severe. An Air Force spokesman told a New York Times reporter that "a preliminary investigation had been ordered." When the reporter asked the significance of this, the spokesman replied: "We don't investigate all of them, after all."<sup>84</sup> According to Hynek, the Blue Book investigation consisted of one man from the 1006th who arrived a few days after the sightings, took two automobile trips to question witnesses, and then told the sheriff that he had completed the

investigation. The investigator failed to interview nine of the fifteen witnesses and also erroneously stated that lightning had been in the area at the time of the sightings.<sup>85</sup> Public pressure for an explanation was so intense that the Assistant Secretary of Defense requested ATIC to immediately submit a preliminary analysis to the press. Although Captain Gregory thought this request was "a most difficult requirement in view of the limited data,"<sup>86</sup> officers at ATIC analyzed the information on hand and released a press statement a few days later. The ATIC officers said that, contrary to the popular idea that many witnesses were involved in the sighting, only three people "could be located" who had seen the "big light." The object was visible for "only a few seconds, not sustained visibility as had been implied." Furthermore, the officer said, the key to the sighting lay in the presence of lightning and storm conditions in the area. The Air Force's final evaluation, written with Hynek's assistance, was that "weather phenomenon of electrical nature, generally classified as 'Ball Lightning' or 'St. Elmo's Fire,' caused by stormy conditions in the area, including mist, rain, thunderstorms and lightning" caused the Levelland sightings.<sup>87</sup> The Air Force attributed the car engine and light failures to "wet electrical circuits."<sup>88</sup> Privately Blue Book officers believed that the Levelland sightings were "obviously another UFO example of 'mass suggestion.'"<sup>89</sup>

What concerned the Air Force most about the Levelland sightings was the amount of publicity they generated. Captain Gregory, operating within the accepted Air Force theorem that one sensationally-publicized sighting would "cause" others, reported that the Levelland case had provoked a "flood" of other reports and "within three weeks this Division [ATIC] had received approximately 500 UFO reports as a result."<sup>90</sup>

To counteract the latest "flood" of reports, the Office of Public Information in the Pentagon released a fact sheet, which stated that "after ten years of investigation and analysis," with the help of a "selected scientific group," the Air Force was unable to discover any evidence for the existence of "Flying Saucers." Using Hynek's name and credentials, the fact sheet explained that "the selected qualified scientists, engineers, and other personnel involved in these analyses are completely objective and open-minded on the subject of flying saucers." These scientists "apply scientific methods of examination to all cases in reaching their conclusions." Moreover, "no report is considered unsuitable for study and categorization and no lack of valid evidence of physical matter in the case studies is assumed to be 'prima facie' evidence that so-called 'flying saucers' or interplanetary vehicles do not exist."<sup>91</sup> To reinforce the fact sheet, an Air Force spokesman told the New York Times a few days later that the Air Force gave all reports the "'most thorough" analysis involving the services of top-level scientists in many fields to be sure that the findings were fair and impartial and "'above all, informed."<sup>92</sup>

Donald Menzel, while attending a meeting in Stockholm, once again supported the Air Force's conclusions and added some of his own ideas about the wave of sightings. As many flying saucers existed now, Menzel said, as did in 1947 and 1948 when the scare first started; this was not surprising because they were all due to "mirages" and other natural phenomena. And Menzel gave another reason for UFO sightings, a reason that the Air Force would use later in its official explanations of the 1957 wave of sightings: "The current rash of flying saucers is tied in with

the sensitization of people to the Sputniks."<sup>93</sup> Doubtless Russian satellites did create some UFO sighting reports; the larger wave of UFO sightings in November of 1957 occurred two months after the first Sputnik, but the sightings decreased to 136 in December and to 61 in January of 1958. The 1958 rate was approximately the same as the 1956 rate, about 650 for the year.<sup>94</sup>

The Air Force campaign to stop UFO publicity seemed to be working. After the 1957 wave, newspaper publicity about the subject subsided considerably and articles about UFOs became rare because, as the Air Force reported, "the press is completely satisfied with the periodic UFO 'fact sheets' made available to them and the Air Force responses to specific UFO sightings."<sup>95</sup> Public interest seemed to be waning by 1958 and the passions that the UFO phenomenon aroused appeared much less intense, although the UFO groups were still strong.

Keyhoe's appearance in February of 1958 on the Armstrong Circle Theater's television show, "UFOs: Enigma of the Skies," added new fuel to the controversy. Departing from the script he had hesitantly agreed to use, Keyhoe said on national television that the Air Force had three "secret" documents of which the public was unaware. These were: the original letter from General Nathan Twining in 1947 establishing the Air Force's UFO project on the premise that UFOs were "real"; the 1948 Estimate of the Situation, which favored the extraterrestrial hypothesis; and the Robertson Panel meetings. But before he could complete even one sentence, the producers cut off the audio so that the home audience heard practically nothing. The producers explained that they had "censored" Keyhoe because they feared a libel suit against the network.<sup>96</sup> In this

case the Air Force seemed to take Keyhoe's side. It was unfortunate, it said, that the producers had cut off the audio, for "they enhanced rather than detracted from Major Keyhoe's position concerning his sensational and unsupported claims." Major Tacker, then Pentagon Public Information Officer for UFOs, wrote that people were more prone to remember sensational accusations than to remember "the responsible statements of such qualified scientists who disclaimed such charges on the same program."<sup>97</sup> The show prompted many letters to Keyhoe and to congressmen. But the Air Force received only six letters, and these, the Air Force said, were all from "cranks." This apparent lack of public criticism pleased the Air Force, and an ATIC officer wrote that "reaction from the CBS TV program has been beyond expectation." The show, he said, actually helped the Air Force because Keyhoe had "alienated himself with the press" by going beyond the script in his effort to criticize the Air Force.<sup>98</sup>

The skirmishes between civilian UFO proponents and the Air Force were not over. In fact, the period from 1954 to 1958 was a transitional one, filled with minor debates, reorganizations, and policy making. Of course, no period has a neat beginning and ending, and these minor battles continued into the 1960s. By about the middle of 1957, Keyhoe and NICAP were just beginning their full-scale battle with the Air Force. Although publicity about UFOs had greatly decreased, Keyhoe always had one great ally to rely on in his war with the Air Force--the UFO sightings. Continued sighting reports in addition to constant pressure from NICAP and other civilian groups created even greater problems for the Air Force: the threat of congressional hearings on UFOs.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>James Moseley, Saucer News, III (June-July 1956), 3.

<sup>2</sup>Leon Davidson, "The Air Force and The Saucers, Part I," Saucer News, III (February-March 1956), 13-16, and "The Air Force and The Saucers, Part II," Saucer News, IV (June-July 1957), 9-16. Leon Davidson, ed., Flying Saucers: An Analysis of the Air Force Special Report No. 14 (4th ed.; Clarksburg, W. Va.: Saucerian Publications, 1970), pp. 145-154 (all subsequent references to Special Report 14 are to this volume and are listed by report title only).

<sup>3</sup>Letter from Donald Keyhoe to Coral Lorenzen, 30 March 1954 (in the files of the Aerial Phenomena Research Organization, Tucson, Arizona, to which I hereafter refer as APRO).

<sup>4</sup>Letter from Keyhoe to Lorenzen, 15 August 1954 and 22 September 1954 (APRO).

<sup>5</sup>Department of the Air Force, "Air Force Regulation 200-2," 13 August 1954, contained in Davidson, ed., pp. 135-138, and at the Air Force Archives at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama, to which I hereafter refer as MAFB.

<sup>6</sup>Edward J. Ruppelt, The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1956), pp. 231-232; Major Robert C. Brown to Commanding General Air Defense Command, "Utilization of 4602nd Personnel in Project Blue Book Field Investigations," 5 March 1953 (MAFB).

<sup>7</sup>Colonel John M. White, Jr., to Commander, Air Technical Intelligence Center, "Report of Visit of ATIC Representatives," 23 November 1954 (MAFB).

<sup>8</sup>United States Air Force, "Status Report No. 11," 31 May 1953, Projects Grudge and Bluebook Reports 1-12 (Washington, D.C.: National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena, 1968), p. 203.

<sup>9</sup>Colonel John M. White, Jr., to Commander, Air Technical Intelligence Center, "Report of Visit of ATIC Representatives," 23 November 1954 (MAFB); Lt. Mary L. Storm to Commander 4602nd (ADC), "Unidentified Flying Object Guide," 14 January 1955 (MAFB).

<sup>10</sup>Herbert Strentz, "A Survey of Press Coverage of Unidentified Flying Objects, 1947-1966" (Diss. Northwestern University 1970).

<sup>11</sup>Department of Defense, "Fact Sheet," n.d. late 1953 and early 1954? (NICAP & APRO); Department of Defense, News Release No. 1053-55, 25 October 1955, attachment (NICAP & APRO). See also New York Times, 2 January 1954, p. 5; J. Allen Hynek, "Are Flying Saucers Real?," Saturday Evening Post, 17 December 1966, pp. 17-21.

<sup>12</sup>A more detailed discussion of these denials will follow later.

<sup>13</sup>Department of Defense, "Fact Sheet," n.d. late 1953 and early 1954? (NICAP & APRO).

<sup>14</sup>Charlotte Knight, "Report on Our Flying Saucer Balloons," Collier's, 11 June 1954, pp. 50-57.

<sup>15</sup>Siegfried Mandel, "The Great Saucer Hunt," Saturday Review, 6 August 1955, pp. 28-29.

<sup>16</sup>"Waiting for the Little Green Men," Newsweek, 28 March 1955, p. 64.

<sup>17</sup>New York Times, 2 September 1955, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup>New York Times, 16 December 1954, p. 24.

<sup>19</sup>New York Times, 16 December 1954, pp. 1, 26; 19 December 1954, Sec. IV, p. 8.

<sup>20</sup>"The Saucers Again," American Aviation, XVII (March 1954), 3.

<sup>21</sup>Donald E. Keyhoe, The Flying Saucer Conspiracy (New York: Holt, 1955), p. 7.

<sup>22</sup>Keyhoe, Conspiracy, *passim*.

<sup>23</sup>There is no evidence that the Air Force produced a Report No. 13.

<sup>24</sup>Letter from Keyhoe to Lorenzen, 6 November 1955 and 28 October 1955 (APRO).

<sup>25</sup>Special Report 14, p. 57.

<sup>26</sup>Special Report 14, p. 68.

<sup>27</sup>Special Report 14, p. 68.

<sup>28</sup>Special Report 14, p. 24.

<sup>29</sup>Special Report 14, p. 24.

<sup>30</sup>Department of Defense, Office of Public Information, News Release No. 1053-55, 25 October 1955, contained in Davidson, ed., pp. D5-D6.

<sup>31</sup>Letter from Keyhoe to Lorenzen, 1 December 1955 and 29 February 1956 (APRO). See also Donald E. Keyhoe, Flying Saucers: Top Secret (New York: Putnam, 1960), pp. 157-160.

<sup>32</sup>Letter from Keyhoe to Lorenzen, 1 December 1955 and 29 February 1956 (APRO). See also Keyhoe, Top Secret, pp. 157-160.

<sup>33</sup>Letter from Ruppelt to Max Miller, 13 February 1956 (NICAP).

<sup>34</sup>New York Times, 22 January 1956, Sec. 7, p. 25.

<sup>35</sup>Letter from Charles A. Hardin to General Watson, 7 February 1956 (MAFB).

<sup>36</sup>Colonel John G. Eriksen, Memorandum for Director of Intelligence, "Proposed Reply by the Secretary of the Air Force to the letter from the Honorable John E. Moss, Chairman, Government Information Subcommittee of the Committee on Government Operations," 25 June 1956 (MAFB); letter from Donald A. Quarles to Representative John A. Moss, 5 July 1956 (MAFB); A. Francis Arcier to George T. Gregory, "Request--Progress on Status of 'Blue Book' Printing and Dissemination," 8 April 1958 (MAFB).

<sup>37</sup>Letter from John E. Moss to Donald A. Quarles, 17 June 1956 (MAFB); Colonel John G. Eriksen, Memorandum for Director of Intelligence, 25 June 1956 (MAFB); letter from Donald A. Quarles to John E. Moss, 5 July 1956 (MAFB).

<sup>38</sup>Captain George T. Gregory, "Lecture on UFO Program for the ATI School," n.d., pp. 1-11 (MAFB).

<sup>39</sup>J. Allen Hynek, The UFO Experience: A Scientific Inquiry (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1972), p. 181.

<sup>40</sup>This film is in the Library of Congress Film Archives.

<sup>41</sup>Christian Science Monitor, 1 May 1956. Captain Gregory's marginal comments are contained in a special file on the film at MAFB.

<sup>42</sup>George T. Gregory, "Memorandum for AFOIN--4X1," 17 May 1956 (MAFB). (AFOIN is the Air Force Office of Information.)

<sup>43</sup>Gregory, "Memorandum for AFOIN--4X1," 17 May 1956 (MAFB); Gregory, "Memorandum for The Scientific Advisor," 21 May 1956 (MAFB); Gregory, "Memorandum for Office of the Scientific Advisor," 5 June 1956 (MAFB); Colonel John Eriksen, "Memorandum for Director of Intelligence," 1 June 1956 (MAFB); Brigadier General Harold E. Watson to A. M. Rochlen, n.d. (MAFB). See also file on motion picture at MAFB.

<sup>44</sup>For a convenient compilation of most years of sighting reports, see Edward U. Condon, project director, Scientific Study of Unidentified Flying Objects (New York: Bantam edition, 1969), p. 514. Many of the statistics are not consistent with Blue Book statistics. For Blue Book's version, see "Project Blue Book, 1964-1968" (MAFB, APRO, NICAP).

<sup>45</sup>UFO Investigator, October 1971, pp. 1-4.

<sup>46</sup>Letter from Keyhoe to Lorenzen, 3 October 1956 and 21 October 1956 (APRO).

<sup>47</sup>Letter from Keyhoe to Lorenzen, 1 February 1957 (APRO); Keyhoe, Top Secret, p. 44.

<sup>48</sup>Letter from Keyhoe to Lorenzen, 22 January 1957 (APRO); Keyhoe, Top Secret, p. 44. See also Morris K. Jessup, "A Report on Washington, D.C.'s NICAP," Saucer News, IV (February-March 1957), 5.

<sup>49</sup>Letter from Keyhoe to Lorenzen, 30 March 1954 (APRO). See also letter from Keyhoe to Lorenzen, 6 November 1955 (APRO).

<sup>50</sup>Keyhoe, Top Secret, p. 20. See also UFO Investigator, July 1957, for short biographies of Board of Governors.

<sup>51</sup>UFO Investigator, July 1957, pp. 28, 30.

<sup>52</sup>UFO Investigator, October 1971, p. 1.

<sup>53</sup>Letter from Keyhoe to Lorenzen, 1 February 1957 (APRO).

<sup>54</sup>Letter from Keyhoe to Lorenzen, 10 June 1957 (APRO); Donald Keyhoe, "Statement by Major Donald E. Keyhoe, Director of NICAP," 7 March 1957 (NICAP & APRO).

<sup>55</sup>UFO Investigator, July 1957, p. 1.

<sup>56</sup>This is an estimate.

<sup>57</sup>Colonel Leonard T. Glaser, Memorandum to Commander, Air Technical Intelligence Center, "UFO Program," 17 December 1958 (MAFB).

<sup>58</sup>Letter from Major Robert F. Spence to Max Miller, 11 June 1957 (NICAP).

<sup>59</sup>Letter from Major General Joe W. Kelly to Donald Keyhoe, 15 November 1957 (NICAP).

<sup>60</sup>Colonel Frank B. Chappell to Chief, AFOIN-X, "New AFOIN-4 Plan on UFOBs," 15 May 1957 (MAFB).

<sup>61</sup>Colonel Frank B. Chappell to AFOIN-XI Colonel Hurley, "New AFOIN-4 Plan on UFOBs," n.d. (MAFB); Memorandum (unsigned) to Chief, AFOIN-XI, "New AFOIN-4 Plan on UFOBs," 13 February 1958 (MAFB); A. Francis Arcier, Memorandum for Director of Intelligence, "Publication of UFO Special Report No. 14," 4 January 1957 (MAFB).

<sup>62</sup>Air Force Regulation 200-2, 5 February 1958 (MAFB).

<sup>63</sup>Air Force Regulation 200-2, 5 February 1958 (MAFB). See also A. Francis Arcier, Memorandum for Director of Intelligence, "Publication of UFO Special Report No. 14," 4 January 1957 (MAFB).

<sup>64</sup>Memorandum to Director AFOIN-4, "Publication of UFO Special Report No. 14," 10 May 1957 (MAFB).

<sup>65</sup>Keyhoe, Conspiracy, pp. 24-25.

<sup>66</sup>Memorandum to Director, AFOIN-4, "Publication of UFO Special Report No. 14," 10 May 1957 (MAFB).

<sup>67</sup>Memorandum to Director, AFOIN-4, "Publication of UFO Special Report No. 14," 10 May 1957 (MAFB).

<sup>68</sup>Colonel John W. Meador, AISS, to the Assistant Chief of Staff/Intelligence, Headquarters, USAF, "Processing of Reports of UFO Sightings," 8 October 1953 (MAFB); Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff Harold E. Watson to General Charles B. Dougher, Commander ATIC, "The UFO Program," 21 July 1959 (MAFB).

<sup>69</sup>Air Force Regulation 200-2, 14 September 1959, contained in Lawrence J. Tacker, Flying Saucers and the U.S. Air Force (Princeton, N.J.: Van Nostrand, 1960), pp. 91-98.

<sup>70</sup>Condon, Scientific Study of UFOs, p. 514.

<sup>71</sup>These sightings are more fully discussed in Hynek, The UFO Experience, pp. 123-128; his analysis is based on a NICAP study. The information for the Levelland sightings is contained in "Air Intelligence Information Report," No. 141957, 2-8 November 1957 (MAFB). See also New York Times, 4 November 1957, p. 4.

<sup>72</sup>"Air Intelligence Information Report," No. 141957, 2-8 November 1957, p. 8 (MAFB).

<sup>73</sup>Hynek, The UFO Experience, p. 124.

<sup>74</sup>Hynek, The UFO Experience, p. 124.

<sup>75</sup>"Air Intelligence Information Report," No. 141957, 2-8 November 1957, p. 5 (MAFB).

- <sup>76</sup>Hynek, The UFO Experience, p. 125.
- <sup>77</sup>Hynek, The UFO Experience, p. 125.
- <sup>78</sup>Hynek, The UFO Experience, p. 125.
- <sup>79</sup>Hynek, The UFO Experience, p. 126.
- <sup>80</sup>Hynek, The UFO Experience, p. 126.
- <sup>81</sup>Hynek, The UFO Experience, p. 10.
- <sup>82</sup>Hynek, The UFO Experience, p. 126.
- <sup>83</sup>"Air Intelligence Information Report," No. 141957, 2-8 November 1957, p. 16 (MAFB).
- <sup>84</sup>New York Times, 5 November 1957, p. 22.
- <sup>85</sup>Hynek, The UFO Experience, p. 128.
- <sup>86</sup>George T. Gregory, Disposition Form, "Request for Air Science Division Review of Levelland Case," 4 December 1957 (MAFB).
- <sup>87</sup>Department of Defense, News Release No. 1108-57, 15 November 1957 (NICAP & APRO).
- <sup>88</sup>Department of Defense, News Release No. 1108-57, 15 November 1957 (NICAP & APRO).
- <sup>89</sup>Gregory, Disposition Form, "Request for Air Science Division Review of Levelland Case," 4 December 1957 (MAFB).
- <sup>90</sup>Gregory, Disposition Form, Levelland Case, 4 December 1957 (MAFB).
- <sup>91</sup>Department of Defense, News Release No. 1083-58, 5 November 1957 (NICAP & APRO).
- <sup>92</sup>New York Times, 7 November 1957, p. 24.
- <sup>93</sup>New York Times, 6 November 1957, p. 12.
- <sup>94</sup>Condon, Scientific Study of UFOs, p. 514.
- <sup>95</sup>Memorandum (unsigned) to Chief, AFOIN-XI, "New AFOIN-4 Plan on UFOBs," 13 February 1958 (MAFB).
- <sup>96</sup>Keyhoe, Top Secret, pp. 155-165.

<sup>97</sup>Letter from Lawrence J. Tacker to unspecified person, 12 March 1958 (MAFB).

<sup>98</sup>Memorandum (unsigned) to Chief, AFOIN-XI, "New AFOIN-4 Plan on UFOBs," 13 February 1958 (MAFB).

## CHAPTER VII

## THE BATTLE FOR CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

Congressional hearings were a serious threat to the Air Force. They might imply that the UFO phenomenon was vitally significant and that the government was very interested in it. This might lead to another "flying saucer scare," threatening to the national interest. Hearings might force the Air Force to declassify its files, contradicting Air Force claims that its files were open already. Hearings might prompt criticism of the Air Force's UFO investigation, criticism that would harm its public relations program. Therefore, preventing or limiting congressional hearings became a major objective for the Air Force from 1957 to 1964.

Handling the hearing problem and congressional inquiries about the UFO program fell to the Secretary of the Air Force Office of Legislative Liaison (SAFLL). It continually assured congressmen that the Air Force's UFO program was adequate to the task. Relying heavily on Special Report Number 14 for its information, SAFLL told New Jersey Congressman Frelinghuysen that there was a "total" lack of evidence to suggest that anything unusual was in the skies or that the objects were interplanetary vehicles.<sup>1</sup> Writing to Representative Lee Metcalf (of Montana) in early 1957, Major General Joe Kelly of SAFLL defended the way in which the Air Force dealt with UFOs: its interceptors pursued UFOs "as a matter of security to this country and to determine technical aspects involved" and it kept the public informed and released summaries of evaluated UFO reports. "For those

objects which are not explainable," Kelly said in support of the classification policies, "only the fact that the reports are being analyzed is considered releasable due to the many unknowns involved."<sup>2</sup>

Despite these assurances, some congressmen still considered holding public hearings on the subject. Under pressure from Keyhoe and NICAP, in January 1958 the Senate Subcommittee on Government Operations (Senator John McClellan, chairman) asked to meet with representatives from SAFLL to discuss the possibility of holding open hearings on the Air Force's UFO program. At the meeting William Weitzen, Deputy of the Air Force Research and Development Operations, said the Air Force saw no reason for hearings but would cooperate if the McClellan subcommittee thought them necessary.<sup>3</sup> The participants discussed the UFO program, the beneficial aspects of the hearings, and the potentially harmful effects of hearings. Whereas hearings might show that the Air Force was "doing its job," the participants said, the "uncontrolled publicity" that might result from them could be dangerous. The outcome of the discussion was that Richard Horner (Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Research and Development) told subcommittee chief counsel Donald O'Donnell that hearings "were not in the best interest of the Air Force." O'Donnell, impressed with the Air Force's UFO program after hearing about its work, said he would advise the subcommittee to drop the issue. In an unsigned February memorandum, an Air Force officer said it seemed as if "there is no longer any basis for congressional, press, or public criticism of Air Force UFO activities." Because inquiries about UFOs drastically dropped after the launching of the second Sputnik and with better public understanding of American space efforts, he hoped that "public thinking will

be more realistically conditioned, transcending from fantasy to fact."<sup>4</sup> Several weeks later, on February 28, Major General Arno H. Luehman, Director of Information Services, asked the McCellan subcommittee to certify that its "preliminary investigation" had "proved" the Air Force was conducting its UFO investigation properly and was not withholding information from the public.<sup>5</sup> The subcommittee refused to cooperate; the members did not want a previous press release to "shackle" them in case the situation changed.<sup>6</sup>

The Air Force prevented congressional hearings, but only for the moment. In June 1958, Ohio Representative John E. Henderson, after reading Ruppelt's book, sent a list of questions about UFOs to the Air Force.<sup>7</sup> Still very sensitive about congressional opinion, Project Blue Book decided to respond with a special, comprehensive briefing for Henderson and other interested congressmen. According to an Air Force memorandum, congressmen complained that constituents were "constantly besieging" them for information about UFOs and that, because the congressmen knew nothing about the subject, they experienced some "professional embarrassment." After the briefing the congressmen expressed confidence in the Air Force's UFO program and said they understood the problems in administering it. Rather than leaving responsibility to the Air Force, the congressmen agreed that they should advise their constituents on UFO matters and also that publicity would be "unwise," "particularly in an open or closed formal Congressional hearing." The Air Force persuaded congressmen that private organizations and authors gave "undue impetus to the existence of 'flying saucers'" and stimulated "unfavorable public hysteria." To bolster its argument, the Air Force distributed classified portions of the Robertson Panel report to the congressmen.<sup>8</sup>

The Air Force had only temporarily forestalled the threat of hearings, though. In August John McCormack's House Subcommittee on Atmospheric Phenomena (part of the House Select Committee on Astronautics and Space Exploration) requested a briefing on UFOs. McCormack wanted a week-long hearing in "closed secret session, unrecorded, names of witnesses to be held in confidence," and decided to call as official witnesses Francis Arcier (the Air Force's Chief Scientific Advisor), Captain Gregory, Majors Best and Byrne of Air Force Intelligence, and Majors Brower and Tacker of the Office of Public Information. McCormack requested that Menzel, Keyhoe, and Ruppelt serve as outside witnesses. Air Force Intelligence thought that if there must be hearings, the Air Force might benefit from them.<sup>9</sup>

McCormack opened the session by explaining it was not really a "hearing"; the subcommittee, according to an Air Force memorandum, was merely "seeking additional information on upper space that would be helpful to the appropriate executive agency."<sup>10</sup> Gregory outlined major events in the history of the UFO program, from Project Grudge and its reorganization to Special Report 14. He correctly explained that Project Grudge concluded UFO reports were misidentifications of natural phenomena, "war nerves," and the like, but he incorrectly stated that press publicity was the only reason for reorganizing Grudge and establishing Project Blue Book. Without mentioning any UFO sighting reports, Gregory said that the "publicity fanfare" about UFOs brought about the 1952 "hysteria." This publicity, according to Gregory, led people to question the Air Force's handling of the UFO "menace." As a result, Gregory recounted, General Samford requested the CIA to review the Air Force's UFO program; it did

so by forming the Robertson Panel which, he incorrectly reported, had sixteen members (it had five). Gregory then outlined the panel's conclusions and recommendations and described the current Air Force UFO program. Without mentioning Project Blue Book's habit of upgrading the "probable" and "possible" categories to "identified" or the Air Force's policy of having untrained Air Base officers identify UFO reports at the base level, Gregory said that Blue Book's improved investigating methods had reduced the "unknowns" from 30 percent to 10 percent. Without explaining that the diffraction camera plan never worked properly, Gregory declared that the plan, while "not wholly successful" because of "lack of operating personnel," produced no results to indicate the objects were not conventional. Gregory said that Special Report 14 found a "total lack of evidence" for extraterrestrial visitors but did not tell the subcommittee that the report said the evidence was ambiguous. He used Hynek as an example of the caliber of scientists who had carefully examined the UFO phenomenon and found nothing unusual about it but did not say that Hynek thought UFOs deserved increased systematic study.<sup>11</sup>

Gregory concluded by noting the rise of private UFO organizations, books, and clubs, and by chastizing the organizations for continually trying to "embarrass" the Air Force. These "self-appointed" UFO groups, he said, constantly misinterpreted, exaggerated, or misquoted Air Force publications "all to the detriment of the Air Force." Gregory added that the Air Force "would be more impressed by all this were it not so profitable." Contrary to these private groups' claims, the Air Force neither did nor would suppress any evidence indicating that UFOs were a threat to the security of the United States.<sup>12</sup> Subcommittee members "highly

commended" Gregory and the other Air Force officers for their efforts. According to Air Force records, the members were "definitely pleased" with its approach to the problem and were "apparently satisfied" with the results. The subcommittee was so satisfied, in fact, that one of its staff told Air Force representatives that it would call no more witnesses and "take no further interest in this matter."<sup>13</sup>

Once again the Air Force had defused an inquiry into the UFO program. But other congressmen, under continuous constituent pressure for public hearings, requested information from the Air Force on previous hearings, briefings, and the like. In response, SAFL in 1959 devised a "policy line" for answering such inquiries. Not mentioning the Henderson, McClellan, or McCormack briefings, the "policy line" stated: the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations (part of the Senate Government Operations Committee) periodically requested information, which the Air Force furnished; after "preliminary investigation" the subcommittee indicated that it did not intend to hold hearings. The Air Force, the policy statement continued, believed hearings "would merely give dignity to the subject out of all proportion to which it is entitled." Moreover, "the sensation seekers and the publishers of scientific fiction would profit most from such hearings, and in the long run we would not accomplish our objective of taking the aura of mystery out of UFO's." Not wishing to appear intransigent, the policy statement assured the reader that--if "overriding considerations" should prompt a congressional committee to hold public hearings--"the Air Force stands ready to give its wholehearted cooperation" to such an endeavor. SAFL also included in the policy paper some statements defending the Air Force's public information policies.<sup>14</sup>

Air Force pronouncements explaining its classification policies often seemed contradictory. Richard Horner, Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Research and Development, told Barry Goldwater in a January 1958 letter that allegations about the Air Force withholding information about UFOs were "entirely in error." But Horner also explained that many people who reported UFOs did not want details of the sightings made public and the Air Force respected their wishes.<sup>15</sup> Writing to Senator Harry F. Byrd in January 1959, Major General W. P. Fisher (who replaced Joe Kelly as director of SAFLL) said the charge that the Air Force was withholding information "has no merit whatsoever." But, Fisher went on to explain, sometimes the Air Force did withhold information from the public to protect witnesses from "the idle curiosity of the sensation seekers" or to keep from "compromising our investigative processes."<sup>16</sup>

Congressional inquiries, threats of public hearings, and public pressure prompted two Air Force actions in late 1958: it issued another "Fact Sheet" in October and undertook a staff study in December to evaluate its UFO program. The October fact sheet said "refinements" in Air Force investigatory processes had led to a decline in the number of "unknown" UFO reports. These refinements essentially were to integrate the "probable" and "possible" categories with the "identified" category, so that the Air Force could claim that the unknowns, which were at 9 percent in 1953 and 1954 and at 3 percent in 1955, were only at 1.8 percent in the first six months of 1958. The fact sheet explained that Air Defense Command personnel conducted the investigations and then sent the data to ATIC for analyses and evaluation "by scientific means"; the UFO project often used the services of Dr. Hynek and other scientists to investigate

individual cases or to conduct "detailed studies" of UFOs in general. As an example of the "scientific" aspect of Air Force procedures, the fact sheet mentioned, for the first time publicly, the 1953 Robertson Panel. It explained that the Air Force convened the panel to conduct an "over-all examination of investigative procedures and findings on specific reports," and summarized the panel's conclusions and recommendations--without mentioning the "educational" program plans. Finally, the fact sheet explained that the Air Force classified reports "only in a few instances" to protect "elements in our Air Defense System" and did not comply with individual requests for information because "individuals who have assisted Air Force investigators" (the witnesses) might be embarrassed.<sup>17</sup>

Although the fact sheet's purpose was to relieve press and public pressure on the Air Force, intelligence officers were not satisfied with the Air Force's ability to counter the inroads private UFO groups had made in its credibility. Therefore, intelligence officers ordered a staff study to examine the public relations problems and to re-evaluate its UFO program. The staff reported that civilian UFO groups frequently investigated a sighting from a biased viewpoint and then publicized it, pointing to inadequacies in the Air Force's handling of the case. Because the Air Force only investigated officially reported sightings, these groups could study and publicize sensational sightings that witnesses never reported to the Air Force. These organizations knew the Air Force's deficiencies and used them to put it "in a defensive position." Moreover, the staff stated incorrectly, "Captain Ruppelt . . . is now affiliated with NICAP," which meant that "political adventurer" Keyhoe and Ruppelt "represent a formidable team from which plenty of trouble

can be expected"; both were in the "business" for the money. Comparable situations existed in forty-nine other organizations, the staff explained, which "for various reasons" felt the need to do everything they could to discredit the Air Force. Often these groups reached witnesses before the Air Force did and primed them on what to say; the group members even remained in the room when the Air Force investigator asked his questions.<sup>18</sup>

The Air Force, the staff concluded, needed to increase its credibility. One problem was that the Air Force did not investigate all sightings and sometimes took a long time on those it investigated. The time delay was crucial because it allowed UFO groups to complete their investigation quickly and put the Air Force on the spot. To complicate matters, the staff said, many Air Force investigators did not have the experience to handle complex situations; all they could do was ask questions as outlined in AFR 200-2. The staff recommended, first, that the Air Force assign eighteen to twenty men to temporary investigating duties and arm them with a UFO "kit" containing a Standard Operating Procedure Manual and other tools necessary for an adequate investigation; the men should be available at a moment's notice. Second, the Air Force should automatically investigate sightings reported to press people but not to it. Third, two members of the ATIC UFO group should be on alert each week for critical investigating duty. Implementing these recommendations, the staff felt, would help alleviate the problem of civilian UFO group criticism and also decrease the percentage of reports in the "unknown" and "insufficient data" categories (as of November 1958, 20 percent of all official reports were in these two categories).<sup>19</sup>

The ATIC commander tentatively approved the plan.<sup>20</sup> But later Air Force headquarters dropped it, apparently deciding not to spend more money on a phenomenon that was no threat to the national security and that seemingly had no scientific value.

In October 1958, one month before the staff undertook the above study, Major Robert J. Friend assumed Captain Gregory's duties as head of Project Blue Book. Friend was, according to Hynek, the only Project Blue Book chief who earned his respect. Having studied physics in graduate school, his scientific training was more extensive than other Blue Book chiefs and he was a "total and practical realist" who understood Blue Book's limitations.<sup>21</sup> For the first time since the implementation of the Robertson Panel recommendations in 1953, Blue Book, under the direction of Friend, began to reassess its role in studying the UFO phenomenon.

The first indication of a new outlook for Blue Book came in February 1959 when Hynek called a meeting of key ATIC and Blue Book personnel, ostensibly because he was smarting from personal attacks and also to review public relations policies on UFOs. Hynek made clear at the beginning of the meeting that the Air Force "had done a good job of handling a very difficult program with the limited resources available" but that the Air Force could improve these resources and other facets of the program. Trying to smooth out some of the public relations and scientific problems, the participants suggested five changes. The first was to eventually change the appellation "unidentified flying objects," although this was not the proper time because such a change would supply "the UFO fanatics with ammunition for a new attack." But the participants did recommend changing the name of the statistical category "unknown" to

"unidentified"; this, they thought, was less suggestive of mystery. Second, the participants thought the Air Force should take advantage of favorable publicity: "Pictures and descriptions of the phenomena or objects determined as being probably responsible for a sighting should accompany a news release." Saying that the overall Air Force approach was not "scientific" enough, the participants' third recommendation was that the Air Force call in a panel of scientists once a month to discuss the UFO problem. Fourth, the participants thought that Project Blue Book should review old, sensational, "unknown" cases--those which private UFO organizations were reopening "to the further embarrassment of the Air Force"--so that, given the "greater scientific knowledge" of the day, they "may be removed from the 'unknown' category and reclassified as a 'probable.'" Concerned about private UFO organization claims that people "held in high esteem by the public" sympathized with the organizations' views, the participants' fifth suggestion was for the Air Force Information Service to ask these individuals "for corroboration or denial and for further detail if in the affirmative." To relieve public pressure on Hynek, the participants decided to discontinue using his name in official press releases and to have the Air Force Information Service answer inquiries addressed to him.<sup>22</sup>

Of the five suggestions, the Air Force implemented two: it changed the name of the "unknown" category to "unidentified" and, although it did not create an official scientific panel, it allowed Hynek to meet informally with some ATIC personnel each month. The purpose of the meetings was to review "troublesome cases," discern trends, and make suggestions for the future. Although the personnel changed, the unofficial scientific

advisory group, which Blue Book recruited, basically consisted of six men in addition to Hynek. They were astronomer L. V. Robinson, public relations specialist Theodore J. Hieatt, chaplain Captain R. Pritz, physicist V. J. Handmacher, psychologist Leroy D. Pigg, and Friend. The group met for the first time on May 5, 1959, and continued to convene about once a month until the end of 1960.<sup>23</sup> The group recommended that the Air Force stop evaluating UFO reports on the basis of their potential hostility and, instead, step up its scientific evaluation of the phenomenon using the mass of available data rather than individual cases. The group supplied a military reason for continued Air Force study of sighting reports: if Air Force personnel did not learn to discriminate between UFOs and "space-probe equipment," in the future they might mistake UFOs for sophisticated enemy missiles.<sup>24</sup> Air Force officials chose to ignore the group's recommendations; and by the end of 1960, the group, as Hynek said, "just petered out." Its effect was nil.<sup>25</sup>

The unofficial group of advisors had no impact primarily because ATIC, while the group met in 1959, conducted its own reassessment of the UFO project and arrived at different conclusions. Friend's outlook, continued private UFO group criticism, and increased expense for public relations all made the Blue Book staff think about getting rid of the UFO problem entirely. Friend realized, perhaps because of Hynek's influence, that UFOs were a scientific problem and, as such, did not fall within the purview of what the Air Force called the "intelligence community." Because of this change in attitude, ATIC ordered a second staff study to determine how to economize on the UFO program and how to devise a different policy toward it.

The staff reported that the ATIC UFO program consisted of four essential tasks: investigating sightings for possible intelligence and/or scientific value; eliminating the "defensive attitude" of the program's public relations philosophy, such as "trying to prove that each object sighted is not a space ship"; informing the public that the UFO program, which evaluated each sighting, "is not essential to national security"; and using a public education program to "strip the shrouds of mystery" from the program because "many innocent people are duped by those who are using the UFO for personal gain."<sup>26</sup> After twelve years of investigating and analyzing UFO reports--over 6000 in total--ATIC had no evidence to suggest that UFOs were either space vehicles, a threat to the national security, or of scientific value. The UFO program was a costly and "unproductive burden" on the Air Force, the staff explained, resulting only in "unfavorable publicity." The program, which strayed from its original intent, was 80 percent public relations efforts, primarily because members of more than fifty private UFO organizations "exploit unidentified flying objects for financial gain, religious or other more devious reasons at the expense of the Air Force." When dissatisfied with the Air Force's investigation, the staff said, these people convinced witnesses to complain to their congressmen, causing congressional hearings, unfavorable publicity, and more work for ATIC. Project Blue Book's staff, which included three full-time personnel, many part-time people, and the field investigators "who must meet this problem on a day-to-day basis," could be more constructive on other programs.<sup>27</sup>

Given this situation, the staff considered four possible solutions. The "immediate elimination of the program" could certainly solve all

problems but would destroy every "advantage" the Air Force had gained in the last twelve years, especially in public relations, and would undermine the average citizen's belief in the Air Force and give "UFOites" and "propagandists" more weapons. Complete disbandment was the eventual goal, the staff said, but "the public must first be conditioned in order that they be receptive of the idea." Thus, the Air Force should still receive and "give proper attention" to reports that might prove hostile or have scientific and intelligence value. A second solution was first to remove the program from the intelligence community "where it is extremely dangerous to prestige" and then disband it completely. The Air Force could transfer the program to a more suitable branch of the service, such as the Office of Information Services; this would eliminate an intelligence program that was "open to public inspection" and lent itself to exaggerated importance. Then, the Air Force would have to embark on a long-range educational program--using the press, radio, television, and motion pictures--to assure the public that it was still monitoring everything in the sky. One disadvantage was the likely "loss of prestige" in taking the program from intelligence and placing it in a public relations division. Another disadvantage would be the expense of a public education program, which would require new coordinative and liaison systems. But, the staff said, "the expense incurred in the public education program will more than pay for itself if this eventually leads to deactivation of the program."<sup>28</sup>

A third solution was the transfer of the program from intelligence to an Air Force division with scientific and technical capability, such as the Air Research and Development Command (ARDC). This transfer

would provide the program with a "fresh approach" and greater scientific stature and would not result in loss of prestige. The disadvantage of such a transfer was that the Air Force would have to establish new directives and lines of communication and train new personnel.<sup>29</sup> The fourth and last alternative was to do nothing, to maintain the program in its special project status at ATIC. The disadvantages here were that the public tended to exaggerate the importance of a program connected with intelligence and that such a "wide-open" program "has a tendency to reduce the prestige" of the entire intelligence community. The staff concluded that the best move was to transfer the UFO program to an Air Force division with scientific capability, which could implement an active public relations campaign with the goal of "the eventual elimination of the program as a special project."<sup>30</sup> None of these possible solutions meant that the Air Force would stop receiving sighting reports, because one of its major responsibilities was to monitor all aerial objects; the Air Force wanted to eliminate the UFO program, not eliminate its watch over objects in the sky.

After reaching the decision, ATIC attempted to interest the Air Research and Development Command in the program. Colonel Richard R. Shoop of ATIC explained to ARDC's commander, Lt. General Bernard Schriever, that the UFO program had potential scientific value in the areas of meteors, fireballs, space vehicles "general," missiles, radar, static electricity, meteorology, and upper-air physics. The UFO program's value to the Air Force, Shoop believed, was not in intelligence but in exploring these areas for scientific purposes.<sup>31</sup> ARDC was not convinced. Major General James Ferguson, ARDC vice commander, replied that more than half of the

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UFO program related to "nonscientific phenomena" and that the other portion, "while possibly associated with scientific processes, does not include qualitative data and is therefore of limited scientific value." Aerial phenomena observations, Ferguson said, would not "enhance" ARDC's research programs and, therefore, the proposed transfer was not "in the best interest of the Air Force."<sup>32</sup> A letter from Hynek to ARDC strongly recommending the transfer failed to move Ferguson.<sup>33</sup>

ATIC next tried to transfer the UFO program to an Air Force public relations agency, such as the Secretary of the Air Force's Office of Information (SAFOI). In March 1960, ATIC Deputy for Science and Components, Colonel Philip G. Evans, wrote to the ATIC commander, Major General Dougher, suggesting this transfer;<sup>34</sup> A. Francis Arcier, ATIC Chief Scientist, concurred; he added that the prestige the UFO program might lose from a transfer to SAFOI was actually an advantage, because less prestige meant less importance. He recommended that Hynek remain the scientific advisor if ATIC transferred the program.<sup>35</sup> ATIC made strenuous efforts to "sell" SAFOI on the idea of accepting the program, but SAFOI, like ARDC, wanted no part of it, for it also thought it would be inheriting a major public relations problem.<sup>36</sup>

While ATIC tried to transfer the program, two more books on UFOs came out and added yet more fuel to the Air Force-civilian UFO group fires. In Flying Saucers: Top Secret, Keyhoe outlined his activities from 1956 to 1960: the formation of NICAP, the Armstrong Circle Theater episode, and attempts to obtain hearings. Now more than ever, he said, he believed the Air Force was "covering up" to avoid panic, not only among the general populace but among its own pilots as well. According

to Keyhoe, Air Force pilots heard rumors that UFOs had caused mysterious plane disappearances; if the Air Force admitted that UFOs existed, Keyhoe reasoned, the pilots would panic.<sup>37</sup>

Keyhoe, from his own perspective, was unable to arrive at a logical explanation for why the Air Force classified its files, denied the existence of extraterrestrial vehicles, and opposed congressional hearings. On the one hand, Air Force public policy statements about UFOs seemed to him contradictory, confusing, and sometimes erroneous. On the other hand, Keyhoe thought there was overwhelming evidence for the existence of extraterrestrial vehicles. Given this situation, Keyhoe reasoned that the only explanation to reconcile the two sides was his conspiracy-to-avoid-panic theory, with minor variations. Keyhoe tried to deal with an illogical situation in a logical manner. In 1953 the Robertson Panel gave the Air Force a reason for secrecy: UFO reports, by clogging intelligence channels, presented a threat to the national security; therefore, the Air Force had to decrease the number of reports by downplaying the entire subject. But by 1960 the personnel change at Blue Book and, to some extent, at ATIC, the lessening of cold war fears, the Air Force's confirmed belief that extraterrestrial vehicles did not exist, and the simple passage of time all obscured the original reasons for secrecy. In their place was the overriding public relations problem, questions about whether the Air Force was "doing its job," was lying to the people, or was competent to examine aerial phenomena. Although the Air Force's goal was to eliminate the UFO program as a special project, it did not think it could take the apparent logical course of action--to open its files, announce the project unworthy of further involvement,

and disband it. Instead, the public relations problem had assumed a life of its own. The Air Force, highly sensitive to bad publicity, looked at the conflict with civilian UFO groups as it would a war. Each attack was a "battle"; to declassify its files, stop its debunking campaign, or close down operations in the face of attacks was tantamount to surrender. The UFO enigma was only of secondary importance, if that; the 1952 "hysteria" and the Robertson Panel's recommendations definitely had receded into the background. With the original reason for secrecy forgotten or neglected, secrecy to prevent "bad press" took prominence. It is doubtful that by 1960 anyone in the Air Force was cognizant of the original reasons for the policies, and certainly not Keyhoe. Consequently, it was easy for him to conclude that the Air Force's action confirmed his theories.

The Air Force public relations policies in 1960 seemed to add support to Keyhoe's theories, especially when Major Lawrence Tacker's Flying Saucers and the U.S. Air Force appeared. Tacker was an Air Force Public Information Officer and the UFO project monitor for the press. He was angry that the Air Force "was being set upon by Major Keyhoe, NICAP and other UFO hobby groups who believe in space ships as an act of pure faith." What he particularly objected to was the "countless harangue[s] that the Air Force is withholding information." He wrote the book to set the record straight and end the debate.<sup>38</sup> The short book was basically a compilation of press releases, fact sheets, and official pronouncements. Tacker began with a short history of the UFO phenomenon, a history that illuminated the lack of basic knowledge within the Air Force of the phenomenon and the Air Force's involvement with it. Tacker maintained that one day in 1896 an airship sailed from Oakland to

Chicago where it disappeared. Astronomers identified it as Alpha Orion "but public opinion was that the object was an airship."<sup>39</sup> Jumping to the 1947 and 1952 sightings, he claimed that lack of data was the only reason that the Air Force did not draw "definite conclusions" and take the "aura of mystery" out of these sightings. The Air Force took the problem of UFOs seriously in 1952, Tacker said, and "put a lot of effort into developing adequate and proper reporting, investigating, analysis, and evaluation procedures." This policy, he said, was still in effect, and "selected qualified scientists, engineers and other technical personnel" at ATIC kept Project Blue Book up-to-date so that the American public remained informed about UFOs.<sup>40</sup>

Tacker responded to four of the most common attacks on the Air Force, essentially the same four that Keyhoe made on the Armstrong Circle Theater telecast in 1958. The first was that the Air Force had a document dated September 23, 1947, which proved that flying saucers existed. This was a reference to the Twining letter stating that the objects were "real" and authorizing an Air Force investigation of UFOs, although Tacker did not identify it as such. His response to this charge was technically correct but deceptive: "There is no official Air Force report or document which states that . . . flying saucers are real." The Twining letter did not contain the term "flying saucers." The second charge concerned the 1948 Estimate of the Situation document claiming that UFOs were interplanetary. Ruppelt, Fournet, and Hynek had verified its existence, but Tacker replied that ATIC never had an "official" document of this nature. In response to the third accusation--that a secret Air Force intelligence report on UFO maneuvers concluded that the objects were interplanetary

(Dewey Fournet's late 1952 study)--Tacker stated bluntly that such a report was "non-existent." Finally, Tacker dealt with the charge that a secret panel of scientists in 1953 urged the Air Force to expand Project Blue Book and publicly release all UFO information (the Robertson Panel recommendations as Ruppelt explained them). Tacker acknowledged the panel and accurately summarized its recommendations, but he failed to include one: that national security agencies should institute a public education program immediately to strip the aura of mystery from UFOs.<sup>41</sup> He failed to give the reasons why the panel convened.

Tacker explained in the book that a team of selected scientists met each month (the unofficial UFO panel) to make sure the Air Force used "every means available" to pursue a "positive UFO investigation program" and that the Air Force conducted a "thorough information program . . . to keep the public informed."<sup>42</sup> In spite of all Air Force efforts, Tacker d, "a small but articulate segment of people" mistakenly believed that the Air Force had not investigated the UFO problem scientifically and that it withheld information from the public. These people, according to Tacker, spoke out because the subject was so "novel and fascinating" that it supported over 100 organizations, all of which expected the Air Force to release its data to provide "grist" for their publications. These organizations made "senseless and vicious" attacks on the Air Force, which "would be remiss in its duty to the American people if by its assistance it encouraged these clubs in their sensational claims and intentions."<sup>43</sup> Tacker concluded by saying that the Air Force had a tremendous job in defending the country from enemies; if the Air Force diverted more money and personnel to investigate UFOs, it would seriously

jeopardize the country's security, allow "sensation seekers" to "dictate our defense policies," and lay itself "open to the charge of gross impudence."<sup>44</sup>

Later in that same year Tacker continued his defense of the Air Force with an appearance on the Washington Viewpoint radio show. He outlined the "vast scientific resources" the Air Force used to analyze UFO sightings, resources such as the Air Research and Development Command, the Air Materiel Command, and scientific consultants from many different colleges and universities. Furthermore, Tacker said, the Air Force had "instantaneous communications world-wide" which enabled it to hear about a sighting anywhere in the world "in a matter of minutes." He compared this to a "small group of euphologists [sic] who have a typewriter and read a newspaper account of the thing, and--you see you really can't compare."<sup>45</sup>

Against all Tacker's assurances, the civilian UFO groups continued their attacks, congressmen remained interested, and the Air Force had to resist new threats of congressional hearings. In early July 1960, members of the Senate Committee on Preparedness, the House Armed Forces Committee, the House Science and Astronautics Committee, and the CIA requested Air Force briefings on the UFO program. The congressmen were receiving pressure from their constituents and they were concerned particularly over the Air Force's lack of adequate investigation.<sup>46</sup> The Air Force gave a preliminary briefing to Stuart French of the Senate Preparedness Committee on July 13. French was concerned about Air Force solutions to puzzling cases and wanted resumé's of several well-known sightings, including those in Washington, D.C., in 1952 and in Levelland,

Texas, in 1957. He also felt that Project Blue Book should have been capable of investigating cases of scientific significance.<sup>47</sup>

The French briefing was a "warm-up" for the major briefing on July 15, 1960. Present were Richard Smart from the House Armed Forces Committee, Spencer Bereford, Richard Hines, and Frank Hammit from the House Science and Astronautics Committee, and two men from the CIA (Richard Payne, Technical Advisor, and John Warner, Assistant for Legislative Liaison to Allen Dulles). Air Force representatives included John McLaughlin (Administrative Assistant to the Secretary of the Air Force), Major General Leuhman (Director of Intelligence), Brigadier General E. B. LeBailley and Tacker (Office of Information), Brigadier General Kingsley and Colonel James C. McKee (Office of Legislative Liaison), Lt. Colonel Sullivan (Intelligence), Major Boland (Legislative Liaison), Major Friend, and Hynek.

The congressmen were not as cooperative as others had been in the past. Bereford of the Science and Astronautics Committee said it had discussed UFOs and they appeared to have "scientific potential." Congressman Smart (of the House Armed Forces Committee) felt that the Air Force withheld information from the public as well as from congressional committees. Although the Air Force assured him this was not the case, Smart remained sceptical. He was particularly unhappy that the Air Force investigated "routine" cases but was "limited" when a case required extensive scientific analysis. He indicated that his committee would be satisfied if it could say the Air Force had the "numbers and the capability" to investigate all cases that appeared to have intelligence, scientific, or public relations value. Also, he wanted the Air

Force to keep his committee advised of all pertinent sightings and warned that future remarks to his constituents would be based on these conditions.<sup>48</sup> Hynek had advised Smart about ATIC's inadequate capability to investigate UFO cases with scientific potential, displaying his growing dissatisfaction with the Air Force; of course, Hynek concurred in all of Smart's recommendations.<sup>49</sup> For the Air Force, though, Hynek's growing restiveness was unimportant. The significant aspect of the briefing was that once again the Air Force successfully prevented open hearings. As General Luehman said to the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, "All personnel attending the briefing were pleased with the results and the general consensus is that no public hearings will be held in the near future."<sup>50</sup>

Nevertheless, congressmen for the first time in this briefing expressed dissatisfaction with the UFO program and suggested steps to remedy the situation. Hoping finally to end congressional dissatisfaction, the Air Force immediately began to deal with Smart's recommendations. ATIC decided that, to investigate cases with intelligence, scientific, and public relations potential, it had to assign another man to Project Blue Book, which had a staff of only one commissioned and one noncommissioned officer. ATIC estimated that it had to investigate from twelve to fifteen cases per year, at a probable cost of \$200 per case, and needed an additional \$3000 to carry out the program; it also needed money to buy a Polaroid camera and geiger counter for the investigators and \$1000 per year to raise Hynek's salary (he was receiving \$3000 per year as a consultant).<sup>51</sup> Accordingly, ATIC made an official budget request to Air Force Central Intelligence (AFCIN).<sup>52</sup> While waiting for

the extra funds to come through, the Office of the Secretary of the Air Force authorized travel money in connection with the recommendations.<sup>53</sup> But in September AFCIN informed ATIC that it would not authorize additional personnel or funds for Project Blue Book. ATIC would be able to institute Smart's recommendations in one way only: Blue Book could have "close telephone monitorship" with Air Base officers investigating a UFO sighting of "extreme importance."<sup>54</sup> The Air Force did not relay this information to Smart, who inquired in November about the progress it had made toward implementing his recommendations. The Office of Legislative Liaison explained that the changes "had yet to be accomplished." In early 1961 the Air Force decided on a compromise plan to satisfy Smart. It fallaciously told him that it had implemented all but one of his recommendations, the one to assign an additional officer to investigate sightings. It had a better plan: rather than use one officer full-time, it decided to place four officers on an "on-call" basis; because UFO sightings were "cyclical and erratic," the four officers could handle the reports more expeditiously. This response seemed to satisfy Smart. It appears, though, that the Air Force never used the four officers for investigatory purposes or even assigned them to the UFO program.<sup>55</sup>

Publicly, the Air Force remained silent about its congressional briefings and investigatory problems. It continued to assure the public that top-level scientists with command of all necessary facilities were conducting a rigorous scientific investigation of UFOs; the Air Force was withholding nothing from the American public, it said, except in certain cases when the data required security classification. The July 1960 fact

sheet criticized the many "self appointed authorities on UFOs" who considered themselves "unofficial advisors to the United States Air Force Intelligence community." Because they did not have this authority under the law, the Air Force thought "it would be entirely inappropriate and even dangerous at times to exercise the Intelligence system in order to give them, or their organization, any notoriety or publicity."<sup>56</sup> ATIC officials privately placed the blame for the July congressional briefings on Keyhoe, NICAP, and other civilian UFO organizations. Colonel Evans reflected this when he said that the 500,000-plus members whom the civilian groups claimed belonged for "financial gain, religious reasons, pure emotional outlet, ignorance, or possibly to use the organization as a 'cold war' tool." NICAP and Keyhoe were of course the principal villains.<sup>57</sup>

Still, many congressmen continued to inquire about the UFO program. The Air Force replied, as it had done in previous years, with statements from the semiannual fact sheets. Once in a while it changed its official "line." For example, writing to Senator Oren E. Long in April of 1960, Colonel Carl M. Nelson (Legislative Liaison) said the Air Force protected the identity of UFO witnesses "in order to encourage the public to report UFO's."<sup>58</sup> Brigadier General Joseph Kingsley, Deputy Director of Legislative Liaison, wrote to John Carstarphen of the House Committee on Science and Astronautics in May 1960 and said that, as Mr. Carstarphen could tell from the recent U-2 incident, the Air Force had a difficult job in defending against "known enemies" and their weapons systems and had committed all its resources to this end; one of the greatest problems in the UFO area was not to waste resources on false

alarms or UFOs which did not constitute a threat to the country's security. Kingsley also told Carstarphen that the Air Force's refusal to lend its resources to private UFO groups was based on the 1953 Robertson Panel, which found that UFOs constituted a threat to the "orderly function of the protective units of the body politic because an unwarranted mass of irrelevant information could clog vital channels of communication and continued false reports could hide indications of a genuine hostile attack."<sup>59</sup> Similarly, Colonel Gordon B. Knight told Estes Kefauver in April 1960 that the Air Force did not honor individual requests for UFO information because it did not have the resources to do so and because most of the replies to the requests ended up in the files of private UFO organizations.<sup>60</sup>

These Air Force explanations did not convince everyone. House Speaker John McCormack, whom the Air Force briefed in 1958, doubted that it had disclosed all it knew at that time. In fact, McCormack believed in 1960 that UFOs were "real" and not familiar objects or delusions. The reputation of many UFO witnesses impressed him and, with Keyhoe's urging, he began to think about holding another congressional investigation.<sup>61</sup> Accordingly, in 1961 he directed Representative Overton Brooks of the House Science and Astronautics Committee to look into the UFO problem. Brooks was sympathetic and appointed Minnesota Representative Joseph Karth head of a three-man Subcommittee on Space Problems and Life Sciences to hold hearings on UFOs.<sup>62</sup>

Keyhoe had written letters to both Brooks and McCormack requesting these congressional hearings and proposing a plan in which both NICAP and the Air Force would present their evidence on the existence of

extraterrestrial vehicles at an Executive Session of the Subcommittee. There, Keyhoe said, NICAP would present "proof" of Air Force incompetency in dealing with UFO reports and "proof" of Air Force secrecy in making "contradictory, misleading and untrue statements" to congressmen and private citizens. Keyhoe wanted the Air Force representatives to answer all NICAP questions about specific cases and methods. In turn, said Keyhoe, NICAP would answer all Air Force questions. If, after hearing evidence on both sides, the Executive Session disproved NICAP's contentions, then Keyhoe would resign as director of NICAP, cease all publications, and dissolve the organization. If, on the other hand, the Executive Session decided that the Air Force was withholding information, then it should ask the Air Force to end its secrecy policies and NICAP would request that the government establish a new agency to "insure the speedy release of all UFO information, with the immediate purpose of reducing the grave secrecy-dangers [sic]." If the Air Force refused to participate in this plan, NICAP would urge public hearings. The full NICAP Board of Governors signed the proposal.<sup>63</sup>

In mid-1961 the Air Force heard about the proposed hearings for early 1962. To meet this new crisis, a memorandum from ATIC's Deputy for Science and Components, Colonel Edward H. Wynn (who took over Evan's spot), noted that "SAFLL's present efforts are directed toward heading off the investigation."<sup>64</sup> SAFLL, however, was unable to prevent House Science and Astronautics Committee staff member Richard P. Hines from visiting ATIC to gather information for the hearings. When Hines, who had attended the July 1960 briefing, came to ATIC, Friend "thoroughly briefed" him on the Air Force method of conducting the UFO program, using "government-wide

facilities . . . to provide data and/or assist with the analyses." ATIC officials, including Hynek, took Hines on a tour of the Aeronautical Systems Division facilities which, they said, were used to support the UFO program. Hines explained that congressional interest in the program was due to pressures of "undisclosed sources" on John W. McCormack. Hines, Friend, and Hynek reasoned that Keyhoe was responsible, especially since he had been behind previous congressional inquiries, had spoken on radio and television about the need for congressional hearings, and had urged NICAP members to write to congressmen.<sup>65</sup> Hines left ATIC "favorably impressed" with the Air Force UFO program and enlightened about Keyhoe's intentions.

A week later, on August 21, 1961, Hines wrote to Major Friend, addressing the letter "Dear Bob" and saying that he had not talked to Karth yet but that Chairman Overton Brooks decided not to hold UFO hearings then or in the foreseeable future. "For this," Hines remarked, "I am sure both you and I breathe a deep sigh of relief." As a result of this decision, Hines explained, the "'Plaintiffs' [meaning Keyhoe] have begun their clamor stimulated by notices in the press of our committee's interest in UFOs."<sup>66</sup> The following week Representative Karth wrote to Keyhoe viciously attacking him for trying to "'defame,' 'belittle,'" and "'ridicule'" the Air Force. He accused Keyhoe of "malicious intent toward a great branch of the military." Previously, Karth said, he thought Keyhoe planned to "prove" the existence of spaceships but knew now that Keyhoe could not do it (Keyhoe never claimed he could "prove" it). Therefore, Karth concluded, he was not interested in holding hearings or "listening to headline making accusations (prompted it seems by past gripes) in open

debate between you and the Air Force." Karth became more agitated as the letter progressed. Answering Keyhoe's request for a face-to-face meeting before the Executive Session of the Subcommittee, Karth said that protocol called for the Air Force and NICAP to testify on different days; Keyhoe obviously wanted the direct confrontation only to ask the Air Force embarrassing questions and indulge in "grandstand acts of a rabble rousing nature where accusations may be made THAT COULDN'T BE ANSWERED BY ANYONE--THE AIR FORCE OR NICAP." Karth was quick to claim, however, that "I am not a captive of the Air Force, I assure you."<sup>67</sup> A few days later Major Friend quoted to Colonel Wynn what Karth had told a newspaper reporter: "[The reporter] was advised by that worthy gentleman that he would not be part of Major Keyhoe's cheap scheme to discredit the Air Force, and that there would be no hearing."<sup>68</sup>

Keyhoe weathered this attack and even managed to soften Karth's views. In answer to Karth's charges, Keyhoe replied that he wanted the confrontation with the Air Force to occur in closed session only and that NICAP did have "evidence" that "UFOs were superior objects under intelligent control" and extraterrestrial. Moreover, the NICAP Board of Governors gave Karth "proof of NICAP's serious and patriotic purpose and its continued offer to cooperate with the Air Force." In place of its original plan, Keyhoe said, NICAP would offer its "massive UFO evidence" in accordance with congressional protocol.<sup>69</sup> During the month of this exchange, Chairman Overton Brooks died. The new chairman, Representative George P. Miller of California, expressed neither an interest in UFOs nor a desire for hearings. On September 19, 1961, Karth wrote to Keyhoe: "Now that we better understand each other, I would hope we could properly

proceed with a new hearing early next year--providing that the new chairman authorizes hearings."<sup>70</sup> Of course, the new chairman did not. Once more Keyhoe had watched the bait dangle in front of him only to see it withdrawn at what he thought was the critical moment.

Events on the UFO "home front" in 1961 and 1962 did not go well for NICAP and Keyhoe. When the organization first started in 1958, Keyhoe maintained close and cordial contact with the Aerial Phenomena Research Organization (APRO) in Alamogordo, New Mexico (before it moved to Tucson, Arizona). Although never convinced of the Grand Conspiracy theme, Coral Lorenzen (director of APRO) supported NICAP by giving "lip service" to the idea. From 1959 to 1961, however, she grew steadily apart from this position. She had worked for the Air Force in a civilian capacity at Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico and found no evidence for a conspiracy there, and she had the growing suspicion that the Air Force UFO program was nothing more than public relations. Mrs. Lorenzen began to feel that NICAP's attacks on the Air Force were misguided.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, APRO was more willing than NICAP to consider reports of UFO occupants. Although both groups strongly disavowed any connections with the infamous "contactees," APRO was inclined to accept reports of "occupant" sightings if the evidence warranted it whereas NICAP steadfastly refused to accept any occupant reports because they seemed too similar to the contactees' bogus claims; NICAP scrupulously avoided even the vaguest hint of hoax. The issues came to a head in 1961 and 1962 when both organizations felt a financial squeeze. Lack of press publicity about UFOs had caused public interest to wane and membership to flag. Many people interested in UFOs belonged to both APRO and NICAP; the 1962 "recession" prompted some people

to give up their dual membership. In an effort to retain APRO's membership, Coral Lorenzen wrote an editorial in the newsletter stating that NICAP was basically a "lobby" group and members should remain in APRO because it was more active in "research" than in uselessly attacking the Air Force. This editorial represented an open break with NICAP and the two organizations never were able to cooperate again.<sup>72</sup>

Other UFO club members had been "sniping" at Keyhoe as well. James Moseley, of the Saucer and Unexplained Celestial Events Research Society, thought the Air Force used Keyhoe to divert public attention from UFOs; and others believed Lorenzen was correct and Keyhoe's energies would be best spent in matters other than lobbying.<sup>73</sup> Another problem which plagued Keyhoe constantly was the contactees; he spent much time telling the press and NICAP members that he did not allow contactees to join NICAP. In 1958, George Adamski claimed on television and radio shows that he was a member of NICAP. Keyhoe found to his horror that his secretary, who actually was second in command at NICAP, secretly had issued Adamski and other contactees membership cards because she was convinced of their truthfulness. To Keyhoe this was treason in his own general staff and he accepted her resignation.<sup>74</sup> On top of this, NICAP was in a continual state of financial crisis. Time and again Keyhoe sent out emergency pleas for donations to keep the organization solvent; the membership always contributed the necessary funds.<sup>75</sup>

Through the rival UFO proponent attacks, contactee troubles, and financial problems, Keyhoe steered a steady course aimed at Congress and the Air Force. Undoubtedly Keyhoe's most important activity in 1962 was to compile with Richard Hall (who had replaced Keyhoe's secretary) a

document containing the best NICAP evidence to support the extraterrestrial intelligence theory. The document contained numerous detailed sighting reports from reputable individuals, scientists' statements, congressmen's statements, and the like. NICAP issued this compendium to all congressmen who expressed an interest in UFOs and in the Air Force's handling of the matter.<sup>76</sup> Most often, however, NICAP pushed for congressional investigations simply by showing congressmen key UFO reports and examples of Air Force secrecy and by its letter-writing campaign.

The Air Force's public relations problems remained--even though the Office of Information, Legislative Liaison, and Central Intelligence tried to avert congressional hearings, discredit NICAP and Keyhoe, and transfer the UFO project. And the sighting reports continued to come into ATIC at a steady rate of between 500 and 600 a year. ATIC received only 400 reports in 1962, but this was far from the desired goal of no reports at all. Consequently, in 1962 ATIC made one final effort to transfer the UFO program.<sup>77</sup>

Edward R. Trapnell, Assistant for Public Relations to the Secretary of the Air Force, had become interested in the UFO program and requested a briefing from Lieutenant Colonel Friend (recently promoted from major). At the briefing, Friend and Hynek told Trapnell about the Robertson Panel's recommendations and the Air Force's attempts to educate the public by stripping the UFO program of its "aura of mystery" and putting it in "its proper perspective." Trapnell "was amazed to learn" that UFO reports were three times higher in 1962 than in the 1947 to 1952 period and observed that "this could grow into a lifetime job unless headed off in some manner."<sup>78</sup> Afterward, Trapnell met with Secretary of the Air

Force Zuckert, Dr. Brockway McMillan (head of Air Force Research and Development), and Dr. Robert Calkins (president of The Brookings Institute); they suggested several transfer plans. The Air Force could transfer the UFO program to an agency such as the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the National Science Foundation, or the Smithsonian Institution. Or the Air Force could contract it out to a private group, such as The Brookings Institute, which would operate the program under the auspices of an Air Force scientific complex like, for example, the Office of Aerospace Research. Or, third, the Air Force could contract the project to a private organization and not keep it under Air Force auspices. The organization could "make positive statements regarding the program and the Air Force's handling of it in the past and make recommendations regarding its future, i.e., disban[d] the program completely" or transfer it to NASA or the like.<sup>79</sup>

Lieutenant Colonel Friend was pessimistic about the transfer possibility, which he thought was all but "impossible" because no one wanted the public relations problem that went with it. Friend believed the only two alternatives left were either to disband the program or to contract it to a private organization under the Air Force's monitorship.<sup>80</sup> Colonel Edward Wynn, Deputy for Science and Components, concurred with Friend but was even more pessimistic about any transfer possibility. Transferring it to NASA or the National Science Foundation "would only serve to convince a larger segment of the public that sightings are due to visits to earth by interplanetary space vehicles." Contracting the project out to another agency would be expensive; the public would think that the Air Force was directing the private agency to make certain

statements; and the Air Force still would have to investigate sightings even though the private group would analyze them. Thus, Colonel Wynn and the Foreign Technology Division (in 1961 ATIC became part of the Foreign Technology Division [FTD] of the Air Force Systems Command) thought the Air Force should embark on a public education program and eventually either disband the special project entirely while still investigating UFO reports at the air base level or, failing this, continue the UFO program in one of its scientific branches.<sup>81</sup>

Despite these arguments, the Air Force tried unsuccessfully to transfer the program to NASA and NSF.<sup>82</sup> In 1962 it finally gave up the entire idea. The program remained at FTD as a special project and without expanded resources.<sup>83</sup> The irony of the situation was that Keyhoe, through his persistent campaign against Air Force secrecy, unwittingly prevented the Air Force from approaching the problem more systematically. By keeping the UFO program and fighting public relations battles with Keyhoe, the Air Force found it had a burden that no other agency--private or public--wished to assume. In a sense, NICAP's fight to have the public recognize the seriousness of the UFO problem had, because of the Air Force's counter efforts, moved the UFO problem away from scientific scrutiny and closer toward Air Force control.

After all transfer plans dissolved, Lieutenant Colonel Friend retired as head of Project Blue Book in 1963 and Major Hector Quintanilla replaced him. Friend, with his training in astrophysics, realized that the UFO program did not belong in the intelligence community and tried to transfer it to a more suitable branch of the service; when this failed, he pushed for disbandment. Quintanilla, on the other hand, had very little

scientific training and made no efforts whatsoever to improve Blue Book's capabilities or transfer the project. His basic outlook was that Blue Book was doing the best job it could and there was no reason to "rock the boat" by improving Blue Book's status. He looked on Blue Book as a collection and public relations agency, not as an investigatory or analysis operation. He maintained complete belief in the Air Force's ability to cope with the UFO problem and its public relations component, envisioning his role as that of caretaker.<sup>84</sup>

While Blue Book's attitude was changing, congressional interest declined and by mid-1963 reached a low point. According to available evidence, Georgia Congressman Carl Vinson made the last congressional inquiry into UFOs until 1966.<sup>85</sup>

In spite of a decrease in press and congressional interest and in the number of UFOs reported to ATIC, NICAP continued its constant pressure on congress. In 1964 NICAP put together another compendium of facts surrounding the UFO enigma (basically a revised version of the previous compendium). Published privately as The UFO Evidence, the 200-page report contained the best evidence for extraterrestrial visitation that NICAP could gather. It covered nearly every aspect of the UFO phenomenon, from details of over 700 sightings (at least 50 percent made by "trained or experienced observers") to congressional and scientific attitudes toward the subject. Complete with charts, graphs, photostatic documents, Air Force statements, and NICAP rebuttals, the book placed the UFO controversy in historical context based on NICAP's perceptions of events.<sup>86</sup> NICAP mailed a copy to every member of congress. Probably as a result of The UFO Evidence and increased NICAP pressure on congress, Blue Book

began to "package" its reports more attractively. Instead of issuing semiannual fact sheets, it began in 1964 to print an annual booklet discussing in detail all the sightings and their statistical breakdowns, the Air Force's methodology, and the UFO program's history. It also included short articles and reprints on the improbabilities of extraterrestrial visitation.<sup>87</sup>

At this time Donald Menzel came out with his second book on UFOs, The World of Flying Saucers: A Scientific Examination of a Major Myth of the Space Age. Written with the help of science writer Lyle Boyd, the book basically rehashed Menzel's 1953 work. Although slightly more moderate in his remarks about "flying saucer enthusiasts," Menzel refused to criticize the Air Force investigation or temper his statements about the absurdity of the extraterrestrial visitation theory. Branching out into the history of the UFO phenomenon, he attributed the 1947 saucer sightings to the efforts of publisher Ray Palmer, who printed Kenneth Arnold's story ("I Did See the Flying Disks") in the first issue of Fate magazine. Menzel said the "panic" of 1952 was a result of Ginna and Darrach's Life magazine article, the Look article on "Hunt for the Flying Saucers," and the issuance of AFR 200-2. These, plus the summer heat wave, meteors, and the 1951 motion picture The Day the Earth Stood Still all acted on people's imaginations and they started seeing flying saucers. Menzel went on to explain that the Robertson Panel spent "five long days . . . analyzing every available act of evidence" relating to possible theories about UFOs and found no support for the extraterrestrial hypothesis. Menzel admitted that the Air Force should have declassified the panel's conclusions immediately because this would have ended the saucer

scare at once. But, instead, "the UFO hysteria continued, and is still dying a slow and lingering death."<sup>88</sup> The Air Force, of course, was enthusiastic about Menzel's book and called it "the most significant literary effort to date" on the UFO phenomenon.<sup>89</sup>

Hynek (now at Northwestern University), in the meantime, continued to change his attitude about UFOs and to call for increased scientific study. The 1964 Lonnie Zamorra case in Socorro, New Mexico, further changed Hynek's mind. While chasing a speeder, police officer Zamorra claimed to have seen an unusual object on the ground off the side of the road. He stopped and approached it on foot; as he came closer, he saw two white-clad figures standing near the object. He lost sight of the object and occupants as he approached through the hilly terrain; suddenly, when he was about 150 feet from the object, which looked like an "up-ended automobile," it rose with a loud noise, silently hovered about twenty feet off the ground, and then sped away horizontal to the ground. Investigating the area immediately afterward, Zamorra discovered three triangular impressions in the ground and a large scorched area in the middle of the triangular marks. Hynek personally investigated the case and was impressed. Zamorra was a reliable, stable witness with impeccable credentials. Moreover, there were other witnesses to UFO activity in the area just before the Zamorra sighting. Hynek issued a statement to the press calling the sighting "one of the soundest best substantiated reports [sic]."<sup>90</sup>

By the end of 1964 the UFO controversy had reached a type of stalemate. On the one side were Keyhoe, NICAP, and, to some extent, APRO. Keyhoe had some support in congress and NICAP still had prestigious people

on its Board of Governors. Also on this side were the sightings, an ever-present source of embarrassment and concern for the Air Force, which had forced itself into the position of categorizing virtually every UFO witness as credulous, gullible, or easily deceived. NICAP's policies, popular pressure, and the sightings created congressional interest and the threat of hearings. On the other side was the Air Force with its three-pronged counterattack: ATIC to evaluate the sighting reports, SAFOI to deal with public inquiries, and SAFLL to counter congressional hearings. The tool they used was elaborate briefings which, while not containing complete fabrications, were certainly deceptive and designed to place the Air Force in the best possible light and its critics in the worst. Helping the Air Force in its public relations were the mass media and most scientists. The latter, believing Air Force press releases, without extensive research experience in the UFO phenomenon, derided the legitimacy of the subject and castigated the people who considered it important. Donald Menzel stood out in this group as the Air Force's leading scientist-ally, as the self-professed UFO debunker and, as he characterized himself, "the man who shot Santa Claus." In the middle of the warring factions stood Hynek. The amount of time he took to change his attitude, the better part of nine years, was a testament to his caution and his concern over other scientists' criticism of him for taking the subject of UFOs seriously. By 1964, though, it was questionable whether he was the Air Force's ally.

The opposing forces faced each other in a standoff. The Air Force public relations policies had decreased public concern over UFOs, but NICAP and APRO continued to bring the subject to public attention.

Congress had not held hearings on the subject, as Keyhoe and NICAP wanted, but the Air Force had averted them only barely. Congress had pushed for expansion of the scientific aspect of the program, but the Air Force managed to avert this too. And within the Air Force itself, ATIC wanted to transfer the program but other divisions refused to take it. The two "variables" that NICAP and the Air Force could not predict were Hynek and the number of sighting reports. At the beginning of 1965, these two "unknowns" assumed paramount importance and opened another "front" in the continuing battle.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Letter (unsigned) from Air Force Office of Legislative Liaison to Frelinghuysen, 12 September 1957 (in the files of the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena, Washington, D.C., to which I hereafter refer as NICAP).

<sup>2</sup>Letter from Major General Joe W. Kelly, Director of Legislative Liaison to Lee Metcalf, 11 January 1957 (NICAP).

<sup>3</sup>Colonel Glen W. Clark, Chief Public Information Division, OIS, Memorandum for Deputy Director of Information Services, SAFS, "Congressional Public Hearings--Unidentified Flying Objects," 3 February 1958 (in the files of the Air Force Archives, Maxwell Air Force Base, Montgomery, Alabama, to which I hereafter refer as MAFB). See also Donald E. Keyhoe, Flying Saucers: Top Secret (New York: Putnam, 1960), pp. 81-96.

<sup>4</sup>Memorandum for Chief AFCIN-XI, "New AFCIN-4 Plan on UFOBs," 13 February 1958 (MAFB). AFCIN stands for Air Force Central Intelligence.

<sup>5</sup>Major General Arno H. Luehman, Memorandum for Director of Legislative Liaison, "McClellan Subcommittee Statement Concerning Air Force Handling of UFO Reports," 28 February 1958 (MAFB).

<sup>6</sup>Major General Joe W. Kelly, Memorandum for Director of Information Services, "McClellan Subcommittee Statement Concerning Air Force Handling of UFO Reports," 3 March 1958 (MAFB).

<sup>7</sup>Letter from John E. Henderson to Secretary of Defense Neil H. McElroy, 8 May 1958 (MAFB).

<sup>8</sup>Major Byrne, Memorandum for the Record, "Briefing of Representative Henderson and Colleagues on the Air Force Unidentified Flying Object (UFO) Program," 23 June 1958 (MAFB).

<sup>9</sup>Major General W. P. Fisher, Director of Legislative Liaison, Memorandum for the Under Secretary of the Air Force, "Hearings on Unidentified Flying Objects," n.d. (MAFB); Colonel Bourne Adekson, Deputy Director of Legislative Liaison, Memorandum for the Assistant Chief of Staff/Intelligence, "Hearings on Unidentified Flying Objects," 6 August 1958 (MAFB); Major Byrne, Memorandum for the Records, "Hearings on Unidentified Flying Objects (UFO)," 12 August 1958 (MAFB).

<sup>10</sup>Major General W. P. Fisher, Memorandum for the Under Secretary of the Air Force, "Air Force Briefing for the Subcommittee on Atmospheric Phenomena, House Select Committee on Astronautics and Space Exploration, on Unidentified Flying Objects," 11 August 1958 (MAFB).

<sup>11</sup>George T. Gregory, Transcript of UFO Briefing, "UFO Program," 8 August 1958, pp. 1-11 (MAFB).

<sup>12</sup>George T. Gregory, Transcript of UFO Briefing, 8 August 1958, pp. 1-11 (MAFB).

<sup>13</sup>Fisher Memorandum, "Air Force Briefing for the Subcommittee on Atmospheric Phenomena," 11 August 1958 (MAFB).

<sup>14</sup>For examples, see: letters from Major General Fisher to Senator Harry F. Byrd, 20 January 1959; Fisher to Senator Mike Monroney, 4 June 1959; Fisher to Senator Barry Goldwater, 29 July 1959 (NICAP).

<sup>15</sup>Letter from Richard Horner, Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Research and Development, to Senator Barry Goldwater, January 1958 (NICAP).

<sup>16</sup>Letter from Major General Fisher to Senator Byrd, 20 January 1959 (NICAP).

<sup>17</sup>Department of Defense, Air Force Fact Sheet No. 986-58, 6 October 1958 (NICAP).

<sup>18</sup>Colonel Leonard T. Glaser, Memorandum for Commander of Air Technical Intelligence Center, "UFO Program," 17 December 1958 (MAFB); Major General Charles B. Dougher to Assistant Chief of Staff/Intelligence, Draft, 16 December 1958 (MAFB); Draft of proposed message to all Major Commands, n.d. (MAFB).

<sup>19</sup>Colonel Glaser, "UFO Program," 17 December 1958 (MAFB); Major General Dougher, Draft, 16 December 1958 (MAFB); Draft of proposed message to all Major Commands, n.d. (MAFB).

<sup>20</sup>Colonel William E. Boyd, Disposition Form, "Support of the UFO Program," n.d. (MAFB); William E. Boyd, Disposition Form, to AFCIN-4X4, "UFO Program," n.d. (MAFB); Boyd, Disposition Form, to AFCIN-4X5, "Support of UFO Program," n.d. (MAFB); Boyd, Disposition Form, to AFCIN-4X6, "UFO Program," n.d. (MAFB); Charles B. Dougher to Brigadier General Howe, "UFO Program," 17 December 1958 (MAFB); Leonard T. Glaser, Memorandum for the Record, 16 December 1958 (MAFB).

<sup>21</sup>J. Allen Hynek, The UFO Experience: A Scientific Inquiry (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1972), p. 187.

<sup>22</sup>Robert J. Friend, Memorandum for the Record, "Unidentified Flying Object Conference," n.d. (20 February 1958?), pp. 2-3 (MAFB); unsigned "Agenda for UFO Policy Making," n.d. (MAFB).

<sup>23</sup>Colonel H. K. Gilbert to Lt. Colonel Parris, Disposition Form, "Unidentified Flying Objects Advisory Panel," 16 March 1959 (MAFB); Colonel Vincent C. Rethman to Theodore Hieatt, 29 April 1959 (MAFB); Rethman to Chaplain Grahann, 8 May 1959 (MAFB); R. J. Friend, "AFCIN-4E4g Weekly Activity Report," 8 May 1959 (MAFB).

<sup>24</sup>Memorandum for the Record, "Meeting of UFO Panel," 7 April 1960, 12 April 1960 (MAFB).

<sup>25</sup>Interview with J. Allen Hynek, 27 September 1972.

<sup>26</sup>"USAF UFO Program," unsigned, 28 September 1959, pp. 1-3 (MAFB). See also Dougher to AFCIN (General Walsh), "UFO Program," n.d. (MAFB).

<sup>27</sup>Colonel Richard R. Shoop, "Study by AFCIN-4E4, Unidentified Flying Objects--Project #5771 (Blue Book)," 28 September 1959, pp. 1-2 (MAFB).

<sup>28</sup>Colonel Shoop, "Study by AFCIN-4E4 on UFOs," 28 September 1959, pp. 2, 3 (MAFB).

<sup>29</sup>"Study by AFCIN-4E4, Unidentified Flying Objects Program Project #5771 (Blue Book)," unsigned, n.d., p. 2 (MAFB). This document differs somewhat from Shoop memorandum above.

<sup>30</sup>Colonel Shoop, "Study by AFCIN-4E4 on UFOs," 28 September 1959, pp. 2, 3 (MAFB). See also Charles B. Dougher to AFCIN (General Walsh), "UFO Program," 28 September 1959 (MAFB).

<sup>31</sup>Shoop to Lt. General Bernard A. Schriever, "Transfer of USAF Aerial Phenomena Program," 1 December 1959 (MAFB).

<sup>32</sup>Major General James Ferguson to Headquarters, USAF (AFCIN), "Transfer of USAF Aerial Phenomena Program," 5 February 1960 (MAFB); Colonel Aaron J. Boggs, Referral Notice, "Transfer of USAF Aerial Phenomena Program," 7 March 1960 (MAFB).

<sup>33</sup>Letter from J. Allen Hynek to General Holzman, 17 February 1960 (MAFB); Letter from General Holzman to J. Allen Hynek, 8 March 1960 (MAFB).

<sup>34</sup>Colonel Philip G. Evans to AFCIN-4 (M/Gen Dougher), "Transfer of USAF Aerial Phenomena Program" 31 March 1960 (MAFB).

<sup>35</sup>A. Francis Arcier, Memorandum for Major General Dougher, "Transfer of UFO," 1 April 1960 (MAFB).

<sup>36</sup>Letter (unsigned) to AFCIN (Major General Walsh), "Transfer of USAF Aerial Phenomena Program," n.d. (MAFB); Major General Walsh to SAFOI (Major General A. H. Luehman), "Transfer of USAF Aerial Phenomena Program," n.d. (MAFB).

- <sup>37</sup>Keyhoe, Top Secret, p. 274, passim.
- <sup>38</sup>UFO Investigator, I (December-January 1960-1961), 3.
- <sup>39</sup>Lawrence J. Tacker, Flying Saucers and the U.S. Air Force (Princeton, N.J.: Van Nostrand, 1960), p. 12.
- <sup>40</sup>Tacker, pp. 16, 17, 18.
- <sup>41</sup>Tacker, pp. 83, 84.
- <sup>42</sup>Tacker, p. 85.
- <sup>43</sup>Tacker, pp. 85, 47.
- <sup>44</sup>Tacker, p. 87. See also letter from Colonel Carl M. Nelson to Senator Philip A. Hart, 4 April 1960 (NICAP).
- <sup>45</sup>Transcript, Washington Viewpoint, 20 December 1960 (MAFB).
- <sup>46</sup>Robert J. Friend to AFCIN-4E (Colonel Evans), "Possible Congressional Hearing," 7 June 1960 (MAFB); Richard R. Shoop, "UFO Briefing," 11 July 1960 (MAFB).
- <sup>47</sup>Robert J. Friend, Task Activity Report, 18 July 1960 (MAFB); Colonel Philip G. Evans, "UFO Case Summaries," 28 July 1960 (MAFB).
- <sup>48</sup>Friend, Task Activity Report, 18 July 1960 (MAFB).
- <sup>49</sup>Hynek, The UFO Experience, pp. 267-269.
- <sup>50</sup>Major General Arno H. Luehman, Director of Information, Memorandum for Assistant Chief of Staff/Intelligence, "Unidentified Flying Objects," 2 August 1960 (MAFB).
- <sup>51</sup>Task Activity Report, 20 July 1960 (MAFB); Richard R. Shoop to AFCIN-4X6, "ATIC Capability for Investigating Sightings of Unidentified Aerial Phenomena," 20 July 1960 (MAFB); Philip G. Evans to Lt. Colonel Sullivan, "ATIC Capability for Investigating Sightings of Unidentified Aerial Phenomena," 29 July 1960 (MAFB); Luehman to Assistant Chief of Staff/Intelligence, 2 August 1960 (MAFB).
- <sup>52</sup>Colonel Barton S. Pulling, Chief of Staff, ATIC, to AFCIN-P, 17 August 1960 (MAFB).
- <sup>53</sup>Shoop to AFCIN-4X6, "ATIC Capability," 20 July 1960 (MAFB).
- <sup>54</sup>Friend to AFCIN-R, Joint Messageform, 26 January 1961 (MAFB).
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<sup>56</sup>Department of Defense, News Release, "Fact Sheet Air Force UFO Report," No. 812-60, 21 July 1960 (NICAP and the files of the Aerial Phenomena Research Organization, Tucson, Arizona, to which I hereafter refer as APRO).

<sup>57</sup>Philip G. Evans to Headquarters USAF, "Unidentified Aerial Phenomena," 27 December 1960 (MAFB).

<sup>58</sup>Letter from Carl M. Nelson to Senator Oren E. Long, 27 April 1960 (NICAP).

<sup>59</sup>Letter from Joseph Kingsley to John Carstarphen, 26 May 1960 (NICAP).

<sup>60</sup>Letter from Gordon B. Knight to Estes Kefauver, 6 April 1960 (NICAP).

<sup>61</sup>Union (Springfield, Massachusetts), contained in UFO Investigator, XI (January-February 1962), 3.

<sup>62</sup>UFO Investigator, XI (July-August 1961), 1; XI (October 1961), 1.

<sup>63</sup>UFO Investigator, XI (July-August 1961), 1-4.

<sup>64</sup>Colonel Edward H. Wynn to Brigadier General Arthur A. Pierce, Commander, Air Force Systems Command, "Congressional Investigation of the UFO Program," 14 July 1961 (MAFB).

<sup>65</sup>Robert Friend to AFSC (SCGP), "Congressional Committee Staff Member Visit," 25 August 1961 (MAFB).

<sup>66</sup>Letter from Richard P. Hines to Robert J. Friend, 21 August 1961 (MAFB).

<sup>67</sup>Letter from Joseph E. Karth to Donald E. Keyhoe, 28 August 1961 (NICAP & MAFB).

<sup>68</sup>Robert J. Friend to Colonel Wynn, "Unidentified Flying Objects," 4 December 1961 (MAFB).

<sup>69</sup>UFO Investigator, XI (October 1961), 2.

<sup>70</sup>Letter from Joseph E. Karth to Donald Keyhoe, 19 September 1961, contained in UFO Investigator, XI (October 1961), 1.

<sup>71</sup>Interview with Coral Lorenzen, June 1971.

<sup>72</sup>APRO Bulletin, July 1962; letter from Richard Hall to Coral Lorenzen, 7 September 1962 (APRO); letter from Coral Lorenzen to Richard Hall, 20 September 1962 (APRO).

<sup>73</sup> Saucer News, V (August-September 1958), 11-13. See also Winston F. Gardlebacher, "Does NICAP Really Exist?," Saucer News, XV (Summer 1968), 9-11; Frank Strange, "NICAP Has Gone Too Far!," Saucer News, XV (Summer 1968), 2-3.

<sup>74</sup> Letter from Donald Keyhoe to Zan Overall, 19 September 1958 (NICAP). See also telegram from Donald Keyhoe to Gabriel Green, 6 July 1959 (APRO): "This is to warn you against repeating any claim that the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena is part of your flying saucer clubs organization."

<sup>75</sup> Letter from Donald Keyhoe to NICAP membership, 30 June 1961 (APRO).

<sup>76</sup> See also UFO Investigator, Special Issue (October 1962), for basic outline of this compendium.

<sup>77</sup> Edward U. Condon, project director, Scientific Study of Unidentified Flying Objects (New York: Bantam, 1969), p. 514.

<sup>78</sup> Robert J. Friend to Colonel Wynn, "Trip Report (UFO)," 9 April 1962 (MAFB); Edward H. Wynn to Headquarters USAF, "Project Blue Book (Unidentified Flying Objects)," 20 April 1962 (MAFB).

<sup>79</sup> Friend to Wynn, "Trip Report," 9 April 1962 (MAFB); Wynn to Colonel Carlisle, "Unidentified Aerial Phenomena," n.d. (MAFB).

<sup>80</sup> Friend to Wynn, "Trip Report," 9 April 1962 (MAFB).

<sup>81</sup> Wynn to Headquarters, "Project Blue Book," 20 April 1962 (MAFB); Wynn to Carlisle, "Unidentified Aerial Phenomena," n.d. (MAFB).

<sup>82</sup> Hynek, The UFO Experience, p. 198.

<sup>83</sup> James E. McDonald, Unidentified Flying Objects: Greatest Scientific Problem of Our Times, Address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors (Washington, D.C.: Pittsburgh Subcommittee of NICAP, 1967; published at author's request).

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Quintanilla, in Herbert Strentz, "A Survey of Press Attitudes Toward UFOs, 1947-1966" (Diss. Northwestern University 1970), pp. 216-217.

<sup>85</sup> Draft (unsigned) of letter to Carl Vinson, n.d. (MAFB). See also Commander Arthur J. Pierce to Lt. Colonel Desert, 18 July 1963 (MAFB); Colonel Eric de Jonckheere, Staff Summary Sheet, "Congressional Correspondence on the U.S. Air Force UFO Program, Congressman Carl Vinson, 18 July 1963 (MAFB); Colonel de Jonckheere, Memorandum to Headquarters, USAF, "Unidentified Flying Objects," 22 July 1963 (MAFB).

<sup>86</sup>Richard Hall, ed., The UFO Evidence (Washington, D.C.: NICAP, 1964).

<sup>87</sup>See United States Air Force, "Project Blue Book, 1964-1967" (MAFB, NICAP, APRO).

<sup>88</sup>Donald Menzel and Lyle G. Boyd, The World of Flying Saucers (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1963), pp. 142, 143.

<sup>89</sup>"Project Blue Book, 1964-1967" (MAFB, NICAP, APRO).

<sup>90</sup>Hynek, The UFO Experience, pp. 144-145; Christian Science Monitor, 1 May 1964, p. 3.

## CHAPTER VIII

## 1965: THE TURNING POINT IN THE CONTROVERSY

For seventeen years, 1947 to 1964, the UFO controversy raged within the confines of special interest groups--the Air Force on one hand and the private UFO organizations on the other. The press, public, and Congress became involved sporadically, but for them the subject of UFOs and the controversy over the phenomenon had only fleeting interest, depending on the frequency of the reports. The Air Force and private group charges and countercharges remained unimportant for most people. The one group that might have given the subject dramatic interest and popular importance--the scientists--remained silent. But the period from 1965 to 1967 marked a turning point in the controversy. Those who had been on the periphery of the controversy became actively engaged in it. The press, public, Congress, and the scientific community all entered the debate over UFOs. As a result, the Air Force finally gave up its near monopoly of the UFO study and asked a university to examine the phenomenon.

The impetus for this turning point was the one unknown variable, and the crux of all the controversy--UFO sightings. Although ATIC recorded sighting reports at a "normal" rate of 30 to 50 per month for the first six months of 1965, it received 135 reports in July and 262 in August. This was the beginning of a "wave" that continued until the middle of 1967. The increase in reports prompted widespread press and public criticism

of the Air Force UFO program and an outpouring of popular articles and books on UFOs.

A long drought of press publicity on UFOs ended in 1965. Since 1957 the press had accepted the Air Force viewpoint and had refrained from criticizing it; many newspapers even refused to carry sighting reports because editors decided the reports were only misidentifications of natural phenomena, illusions, or fabrications. But in August 1965, following a series of spectacular UFO sightings in Texas, newspaper interest began to revive.<sup>1</sup> The new attitude seemed to be a product of frustration over the Air Force's inability to explain UFOs. Since Air Force pronouncements had not affected the number of sighting reports, more newspaper editors and reporters became suspicious of the Air Force's role. Some newspapers even seemed to agree with NICAP's conspiracy theories.

The Charleston (South Carolina) Evening Post said in 1965 that "something is going on 'up there' and we rather suspect the Air Force knows it." When the Air Force was confronted with a UFO report, the Evening Post stated, it "immediately begins to crank out of the wild blue yonder the same pre-recorded announcement it has been playing for 20 years: "scratch, scratch, the Air Force has no evidence, scratch, scratch, the Air Force has no evidence . . . . If our courts shared the Air Force's professed suspicion of creditable witnesses our jails would be empty."<sup>2</sup> The Orlando (Florida) Sentinel printed a compilation of newspaper editorials in early September 1965 and noted that many editorial writers had changed focus, "from outright scepticism to at least tentative belief" in extraterrestrial visitation. The Sentinel predicted that if these editorial writers joined with congressmen interested in the UFO problem, then "perhaps something

will happen," and the Air Force would be forced to open its classified UFO files. "Whether UFOs or not, the public deserves to know." The Fort Worth Star Telegram said that the Air Force "can stop kidding us now about there being no such things as flying saucers . . . . It's going to take more than a statistical report on how many reported saucers turned out to be jets and weather balloons to convince us otherwise." The editor of the Richmond (Virginia) News Leader wrote that only "imprudent" people would deny the possibility that UFOs were "real"; "attempts to dismiss the reported sightings . . . serve only to heighten the suspicion that there's something out there. The Air Force doesn't want us to know." For the Alameda (California) Times-Star the time was "long overdue" for governmental disclosure of all it knew about UFOs. "It would surprise no one today to learn that some UFOs are spacecraft from elsewhere in the solar system or beyond. In fact, it would even be more surprising to learn that they were not."<sup>3</sup> The Christian Science Monitor remarked that recent sightings over Texas gave "the clearest evidence of all that something strange was actually in the sky." The Monitor called for a "thorough look at the saucer mystery."<sup>4</sup> A week later Monitor natural science editor Robert C. Cowen said that, although the Air Force has tried to brush off puzzling reports with handy explanations, "something is definitely going on that cannot yet be explained" and "the long standing saucer mystery begs for thorough scientific study."<sup>5</sup> As if to soften a hastily taken stand, a few weeks later he wrote that additional data could clear up the puzzling reports and that he did not really believe in extraterrestrial visitation.<sup>6</sup>

By the end of 1965 ATIC had received nearly 1000 reports for the year; this rivaled the number in 1952 and 1957 and created great public

interest in UFOs and the Air Force's investigation of them.<sup>7</sup> As usual the sighting wave also prompted a host of explanations. Astronomer Robert L. Brown of Southern Connecticut State College offered one of the most ingenious: saucer sightings were actually lunar dust; when the retrorockets on the Russian moon satellite (Lunik V) fired, a dust cloud rose up and the earth's gravitational field pulled it in; the dust could hover, become luminous, or move erratically; therefore, the saucer mystery could be "resolved in rather simple terms devoid of any reference to visitors from outer space." A spokesman for the Federal Aviation Agency gave reporters a more standard explanation when he said the sightings were due to the "long, hot summer," which "expedites the imagination."<sup>8</sup> Some scientists expressed reservations about the Air Force's "pat" explanations for UFOs; the Wall Street Journal printed some of these opinions. I. M. Levitt, director of the Fels Planetarium, who made national news in 1952 by calling the famous Washington, D.C., sightings mirages and temperature inversions, now said that "the Air Force should admit that there are natural phenomena taking place under our noses of which we know nothing . . . . The Air Force is trying to explain something that isn't susceptible to explanation." Robert Risser, director of the Oklahoma Science and Art Foundation Planetarium, criticized the Air Force for saying that the August sightings were actually stars; those stars, Risser said, were not visible at that time of year and "the Air Force must have had its star-finder upside down during August." Dr. Frank Salisbury, a plant physiologist at Utah State University who was rapidly becoming a proponent of the extraterrestrial hypothesis as a result of studying UFO reports, said that people had to consider the tentative possibility that UFOs were "spaceships."<sup>9</sup>

Columnist John Fuller, in an article for the Saturday Review, greatly stimulated public interest in the subject. Fuller, a self-proclaimed "sceptic" about UFOs, decided to investigate thoroughly "at least one specific case of UFO-chasing"; he contacted NICAP which brought a case in Exeter, New Hampshire, to his attention. Upon investigation Fuller found that two policemen and a nineteen year-old college student had observed at close range a large, metallic-like object which hovered silently over them; at one point the object came so close to the amazed witnesses that they had to drop to the ground; the policemen drew their guns but did not fire.<sup>10</sup> Fuller's article caught the attention of the G. P. Putnam publishing firm which commissioned him to write a book on the Exeter sightings. He spent over a month in Exeter interviewing UFO witnesses and uncovered over seventy-five additional sightings.<sup>11</sup> This experience convinced him that there was "overwhelming evidence" that UFOs were extra-terrestrial. Before Putnam published Fuller's book, Look magazine printed excerpts from it and insured a wide readership. In the meantime, the subject of UFOs became a staple of Fuller's Saturday Review column. By January 1966, a month before the Look article appeared, Fuller believed that "the truth" about UFOs would not remain hidden forever; "in fact," he said, "many are wondering if it isn't time for the government either to explain whatever it knows, or to order a research project to investigate the phenomenon and reveal the facts."<sup>12</sup> When the Air Force interpreted what the two policemen and the college student saw as a mirage caused by a temperature inversion, Fuller began to think that perhaps there was an Air Force "cover-up" about UFOs.<sup>13</sup> These statements plus the Look article made Fuller a nationally known "authority" on UFOs. With the phenomenon so

much in vogue, he added to UFO publicity by becoming a frequent visitor to television interview shows.<sup>14</sup>

Fuller was not the only UFO proponent to capitalize on media interest. During the last months of 1965 and the first months of 1966, Keyhoe and NICAP staff members appeared on the Today show, the Tonight show, NBC's panel show Open Mind, The Mike Douglas Show, and many radio shows, and accepted numerous speaking engagements. This visibility helped NICAP's continuing campaign to publicize the UFO phenomenon. By February 1966, Keyhoe could say that over the past nine years he, NICAP Board members, and NICAP general members had appeared on over 900 television and radio shows and conducted over 500 public discussions; Keyhoe himself was responsible for 400 broadcasts and 100 public talks.<sup>15</sup> The renewed interest in UFOs during 1965 to 1967 started a fad in television shows. Just as sighting reports in the early 1950s had stimulated motion pictures with flying saucer themes, the revived interest in the middle 1960s stimulated several television shows with either flying saucer or interplanetary travel themes. Among these were Star Trek, which used a version of the 1948 Captain Mantell incident for one of its episodes, Lost in Space, and The Invaders, which continued the old motion picture extraterrestrial-as-hostile theme.

With the increased interest and publicity in 1965, the Air Force became worried. Taking advantage of this concern, Hynek wrote to Colonel Spaulding about the need for a scientific investigation of the UFO phenomenon. Hynek proposed that a panel of civilian scientists carefully review the UFO situation "to see whether a major problem really exists" and make recommendations about the program's future status within the Air

Force.<sup>16</sup> The Air Force, looking in earnest for a solution to its problem, took Hynek's suggestions under advisement and turned the UFO program's future over to the Public Information Office. On September 28, 1965, Director of Information General E. B. LeBailly wrote to the Military Director of the Air Force's Scientific Advisory Board and said: the Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans and Operations (General Arthur C. Agan) determined that Project Blue Book was a worthwhile program deserving more support and that the Air Force should continue to investigate UFOs "to assure that such objects do not present a threat to our national security"; the project would remain at FTD. LeBailly noted that reputable individuals "whose integrity cannot be doubted" made many reports and that, in addition, reports sent to the Air Force were only a small portion of the "spectacular reports which are publicized by many private UFO organizations." Using Hynek's suggestion, LeBailly requested "that a working scientific panel composed of both physical and social scientists be organized to review Project Blue Book--its resources, methods, and findings--and to advise the Air Force as to any improvements that should be made in the program to carry out the Air Force's assigned responsibility."<sup>17</sup>

The panel that resulted from the LeBailly letter turned out to be the impetus for a new approach to the problem and for taking the investigation out of military hands. It was called the Ad Hoc Committee to Review Project Blue Book, with Dr. Brian O'Brien as chairman and five other scientists as participants: Drs. Carl Sagan, Jesse Orlansky, Launor Carter, Willis A. Ware, and Richard Porter. All the scientists but Sagan were members of the Air Force's Scientific Advisory Board. The committee met

for one day in February 1966 at which time it reviewed the Robertson report of 1953 and heard a briefing from Quintanilla and the FTD staff. The committee members were satisfied that UFOs were not a threat to the national security, that the Air Force program was "well organized" albeit "quite limited," and that no UFO case represented technological or scientific advances outside of a terrestrial framework. Although the committee found that most "unidentifieds" were in this category because of insufficient data, it also decided that some "identifieds" did not belong in that category because of insufficient data. Assuming that it was always possible for a sighting to have scientific value, the committee recommended that the UFO program "be strengthened to provide opportunity for scientific investigation of selected sightings in more detail and depth than has been possible to date." To accomplish this, the committee suggested that the Air Force negotiate contracts "with a few selected universities to provide selected teams to investigate promptly and in depth certain selected sightings of UFOs"; a single university should coordinate the "teams" which together should study 100 sightings per year, devoting an average of 10 man-days to each investigation and the resulting report. The committee recommended that each team have at least one psychologist, "preferably one interested in clinical psychology," a physical scientist, and an astronomer or astrophysicist, and that Air Base UFO officers should work with the teams. The committee hoped that these new investigations would "provide a far better basis than we have today for a decision on a long term UFO program." In addition, the committee, being aware of the Air Force's public relations difficulties, recommended disseminating Project Blue Book reports among "prominent members of the Congress and

other public persons" to give evidence that the Air Force was taking a scientific approach.<sup>18</sup>

The O'Brien committee represented both a break in and a continuation of Air Force UFO policy. It was a break in that it recommended that a university conduct a systematic, detailed study of UFO reports. It was a continuation in that it recommended, in different language, that the Air Force resolve its UFO problem by getting rid of the program. Contracting out the investigation to a university was another means of transferring the program. The Air Force was cautious and did not move to implement these recommendations at once. Keeping them classified, the Air Force waited to see if the new flying saucer "scare" would die down. It did not.

The sighting wave which began in July 1965 continued through 1967. In fact, there were more sightings reported in 1966 and 1967 than in 1965, making this the first time that sighting reports remained at very high levels for three consecutive years. Public interest was at a peak: a May 1966 Gallup Poll indicated that 96 percent of the American people had heard or read about "flying saucers"; of these, 46 percent thought them to be "real" and 29 percent, "imaginary"; moreover, 5 percent of the people who had heard of "flying saucers" thought they had seen one personally--this represented approximately nine million people.<sup>19</sup> Once again the flying saucer "hysteria" gripped the country, with one dramatic sighting after another the subject of newspaper and magazine articles. The Gallup Poll findings may have been due to one of the most widely publicized events in the history of the UFO controversy: the furor over the explanation of the Dexter and Hillsdale, Michigan, sightings in March 1966.

On March 20, 1966, eighty-seven women students and a civil defense director at Hillsdale College saw a "football shaped" glowing object hovering over a swampy area a few hundred yards from the women's dormitory; the witnesses claimed the object "flew" directly at the dormitory but then stopped suddenly and retreated back to the swamp; the object "dodged an airport beacon light," appeared to "dim" when automobiles approached the area, and then "brightened when the cars left"; the witnesses watched the object for four hours.<sup>20</sup> On March 21, twelve people--including several police officers--in Dexter saw a large, glowing object rise from a swampy area on a farm, hover for a few minutes at about 1000 feet, and then leave the area. Over 100 witnesses saw objects on these two nights in two Michigan cities which were sixty-three miles apart.<sup>21</sup> The story of these somewhat "routine" sightings caught fire: within a few days virtually every newspaper in the country and all national news shows carried the report. Reporters put intense pressure on the Air Force to investigate the incidents and arrive at a conclusion immediately.

Quintanilla sent Hynek to the scene. When he arrived, he encountered a situation "so charged with emotion that it was impossible for [him] to do any really serious investigation"; he recalled that he had to fight his way through reporters to interview the witnesses and that the entire region "was gripped with near-hysteria"; police, he said, were madly chasing stars they thought to be flying saucers and people believed space ships were all over the area.<sup>22</sup> After his investigation, Hynek held a press conference to explain what happened. Hynek claimed the Air Force ordered him to hold the press conference; Quintanilla, on the other hand, claimed Hynek informed him that he had the solution and therefore gave

Hynek permission to hold the conference.<sup>23</sup> Whatever the impetus, the press conference was a singularly important event in the history of the UFO controversy. Hynek described it as a "circus," with a mélange of television cameramen, newspapermen, photographers, and others all "clamoring for a single, spectacular explanation of the sightings." Hynek's explanation was couched in tentative terms and was meant to cover only some of the sightings in the area; some of the faint lights people had observed could have been the result of decaying vegetation which spontaneously ignited and created a faint glow--this phenomenon is known as "swamp gas." As soon as he handed out the written press statement, Hynek recalled, he "watched with horror as one reporter scanned the page, found the phrase 'swamp gas,' underlined it, and rushed for a telephone."<sup>24</sup> Journalism Professor Herbert Strentz, in his study of newspaper attitudes toward UFOs, pointed out that "press and public reactions to the 'swamp gas' theory were prompt, wide-ranging and generally hostile"; not one of the 100 witnesses involved in the sightings accepted the explanation.<sup>25</sup>

The swamp gas solution became an object of ridicule and humor throughout the nation. Numerous cartoons lampooning the solution appeared in newspapers and magazines throughout the country and press coverage of UFOs increased steadily during March and April 1966. Life magazine ran an eight-page feature on the Hillsdale sightings and UFOs, including full-page color photographs of various UFOs. Entitled "Well-witnessed Invasion by Something: Australia to Michigan," Life's story hit hard at the swamp gas explanation through interviewing witnesses and showing photographs of the area.<sup>26</sup> An article in the New Yorker magazine stated acidly: "We read the official explanations with sheer delight, marveling

at their stupendous inadequacy. Marsh gas, indeed! Marsh gas is more appropriate an image of that special tediousness one glimpses in even the best scientific minds."<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, Time continued its hostility toward the idea that UFOs might be extraterrestrial and agreed with the swamp gas explanation; it called the current wave of sightings "primavera delirium" and said the sightings were an "American mythology."<sup>28</sup> The Wisconsin State Journal featured Hynek's explanation in red, front page, banner headlines, and an editorial stated that the swamp gas theory "smells."<sup>29</sup> The New York Times printed a witness's drawing of the Dexter UFO and compared it with a drawing of one of George Adamski's sightings; the Times lumped Adamski and the witnesses from Dexter in the same category. In the same issue reporter Evert Clark wrote that Congress was reluctant to investigate the UFO sightings because it would "encourage the idea that there is more to the unidentified flying objects than mistaken sightings of natural and manmade objects"; an investigation "might frighten much of the public . . . by seeming to indicate concern in Congress."<sup>30</sup> In another editorial, the New York Times continued to oppose the idea that the UFO phenomenon was unique by explaining: "people who are conditioned by television, comic strips and books to believe in flying saucers find it easy to see them in [man-made] phenomena" and the Michigan sightings were a product of people's "strange propensity for seeing what they want to see."<sup>31</sup> But the Christian Science Monitor said that the recent sightings and investigation in Michigan had "deepened the mystery" of UFOs and "it is time for the scientific community to conduct a thorough and objective study of the 'unexplainable.'"<sup>32</sup> Syndicated columnist Roscoe Drummond decided that the swamp gas explanation had signaled the time "for Congress to take

charge" in an investigation and "a more thorough and objective search for the facts is in order."<sup>33</sup>

The uproar over the latest wave of sightings in general and the Dexter-Hillsdale ones in particular was so great that Weston E. Vivian (Democratic congressman from Michigan) and Gerald R. Ford (House Republican minority leader) called for congressional hearings.<sup>34</sup> In a letter to the House Armed Services Committee requesting the hearings, Ford enclosed several newspaper articles criticizing the Air Force investigation of the events in Michigan and the New Hampshire sightings. Referring to these and other public statements questioning the Air Force, Ford said "the American public deserves a better explanation than that thus far given by the Air Force"; to "establish credulity" about UFOs, he "strongly" recommended a committee investigation of the subject.<sup>35</sup> Keyhoe, of course, quickly praised Congressman Ford's suggestion, telling the Associated Press that the Pentagon had a "top level policy of discounting all UFO reports" and that the Air Force for years had used ridicule to debunk sightings.<sup>36</sup>

The House Armed Services Committee acted on Ford's suggestion. On April 5, 1966--for the first time in the history of the controversy over unidentified flying objects--Congress held an open hearing on the subject. The committee, under the chairmanship of L. Mendel Rivers, invited only three people to testify: Secretary of the Air Force Harold D. Brown, Project Blue Book Chief Hector Quintanilla, and Hynek--all associated with the Air Force. The committee did not invite a NICAP representative, but a NICAP member submitted material for the record, hoping this would balance the Air Force testimony.<sup>37</sup> Secretary Brown began the formal testimony by

reading a statement outlining the Air Force views as made public in its press releases, fact sheets, and Blue Book reports; he included the Le-Bailly letter and the report of the Ad Hoc Committee to Review Project Blue Book (the O'Brien committee). Brown's main point was that there was no evidence that UFOs threatened the national security or were the products of extraterrestrial intelligence.<sup>38</sup> Hynek spoke next. Reacting to press criticism of his swamp gas explanation and unhappy over charges that he was a "puppet" of the Air Force, Hynek said he would read a "daring" statement "which has certainly not been dictated by the Air Force." His main point was his now frequent refrain that UFOs were worthy of the scientific community's attention; he warned that complete adherence to the policy that all UFO reports had "conventional" explanations "may turn out to be a roadblock in the pursuit of research endeavors." The Air Force had said always, he claimed, that it could either identify an object or prove the sighting invalid if it investigated the case long enough; this, Hynek said, was an example of a "poverty of hypotheses" and investigators were apt to miss "matters of great scientific value" if the phenomenon did not fit the "accepted scientific outlook of the time." He called for a civilian panel of scientists to examine the UFO program "critically" and to determine if a "major problem" actually existed.<sup>39</sup> Quintanilla did not make a formal statement.

During the questioning following the formal testimony, Secretary Brown mentioned that he was considering the O'Brien committee's recommendation for a private study. The congressional committee was pleased to hear this and repeated its pleasure several times. Hynek brought up the point that foreign governments looked to the American Air Force for

guidance in UFO matters but that the Air Force had opened no official lines of inquiry or scientific exchange with any other government. Commenting about this, Secretary Brown said that the Air Force had no scientific information to exchange and that the thrust of the program had been to give the public a certain kind of evidence so that the UFO phenomenon did not "get more out of hand."<sup>40</sup> Following the questioning there was a general discussion about public pressure and press publicity, especially the Life magazine article which had appeared the previous week. The hearings closed amidst much tongue-in-cheek humor, a few questions to Quintanilla, and an expression of satisfaction that the Air Force would implement the O'Brien recommendations.<sup>41</sup>

Although Secretary Brown only had been considering the O'Brien recommendations, that afternoon--as soon as the hearing concluded--he directed the Air Force Chief of Staff to accept the O'Brien committee recommendations and to make arrangements for a scientific team to investigate selected UFO sightings.<sup>42</sup> By deciding to contract out the UFO study to a university, the Air Force tacitly acknowledged that its nineteen years of investigation and analysis had been inadequate. The UFO program was a constant source of embarrassment for the Air Force: private groups continually attacked the Air Force; citizens who thought "something must be there" distrusted the Air Force; congressmen threatened it with hearings; and sighting reports continued. Since 1947 the Air Force had been in the unenviable position of having to pass judgment on every report of an unusual occurrence in the sky. And because these decisions were not always satisfactory, for years the Air Force tried to placate the public and congress with fact sheets and special briefings. Even high-ranking

government officials tried to help until the very end. In a session of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, just five days before the UFO hearings, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Earle Wheeler both stated for the record that UFO reports did not represent a unique phenomenon and the Air Force's investigation was adequate.<sup>43</sup> But none of these efforts stopped the discontent and, in April 1966, the Air Force finally moved to extricate itself from the UFO dilemma. The open congressional hearings did not directly force the Air Force to support a scientific investigation of UFOs but certainly did insure that it would take place.

The Air Force formed a panel of six people to help implement the O'Brien committee recommendations. The panel consisted of O'Brien and another member of the original Ad Hoc Committee, two military personnel from the Air Force Scientific Advisory Board, a representative from the Air Force Office of Public Information, and Lieutenant Colonel Robert Hippler of the Office of Scientific Research who was responsible for obtaining university participation in the project. General James Ferguson (Deputy Chief of Staff for Research and Development) assumed the duty of administering all the panel's decisions. The panel first decided that a "lead university" could best coordinate a set of investigation teams and, with assistance from the National Academy of Sciences, prepared a list of twenty-five prospective universities. Because the UFO problem was "an emotional phenomenon," Dr. O'Brien said, he thought his friend, Dr. Horton G. Stever, President of the Carnegie Institute of Technology, should write letters to university presidents to get a feel for their attitudes toward the project. Recognizing that the UFO program was "99%"

public relations, the panel recommended that the proposed investigating teams have the necessary skills "to give good Air Force public relations."<sup>44</sup> The panel suggested that both Hynek and Menzel should be on the investigating teams but then reversed this decision because both men had made their feelings on the subject public. The panel wanted the results of the proposed investigation to allow the Air Force finally to know whether to continue the UFO program in its present capacity, increase efforts, or "discontinue the effort and get the Air Force out of the business."<sup>45</sup>

It was not until May 9, 1966, that the Air Force disclosed publicly its plan to contract with scientists for a UFO investigation.<sup>46</sup> But by that time the prospects looked dim. According to Colorado psychologist and future project member David R. Saunders, none of the universities that Colonel Hippler tried to interest in the UFO project would have it, presumably because of the public relations problem and the topic's "illegitimacy." Harvard, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the University of North Carolina, and the University of California were among those that turned down the project. During the search the Air Force abandoned its plan to have several universities coordinate investigating teams and looked for only one university to conduct the entire study. When Colonel Hippler failed, Dr. William T. Price (Air Force Office of Scientific Research) tried; he too was unsuccessful. Finally, Dr. J. Thomas Ratchford (Office of Scientific Research) took over the task of finding a "buyer." He first tried to interest the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Colorado--to no avail. The center's director, Dr. Walter Orr Roberts, suggested the University of Colorado. When Ratchford asked Colorado in August 1966 to take the project, he assured

the administration and faculty chairmen that the National Center for Atmospheric Research had been the Air Force's first choice and Colorado its second.<sup>47</sup> The University of Colorado was interested.

The decision to accept the Air Force's proposal rested in large part on the composition of the Psychology Department faculty. Because the Air Force Office of Scientific Research required that at least one clinical psychologist be attached to the project and that other psychologists in the fields of perception, cognition, and data gathering should help if possible, the Psychology Department had to be sure it could recruit people with these qualifications. It did not see this as a problem and was receptive to the idea of taking the study. Internationally-known physicist and former head of the United States Bureau of Standards, Dr. Edward U. Condon, and the university administration were interested as well. Furthermore, the Air Force was offering an appealing incentive: it would forego congressional cost-sharing regulations for federal grants so that the university would have to pay only one dollar to receive \$300,000. David Saunders thought that--as a result of legislative budget cuts for the university--the \$300,000 government offer might have looked especially good to Colorado and might have been a factor in the decision. Also, in its zeal to induce Colorado to take the project, the Air Force turned the grant into a contract; this meant that the government added \$13,000 to the \$300,000 to cover the university's cost of operating the program.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, at this time Condon (who would head the UFO study) was running for public election to the University of Colorado's Board of Regents and pledged to try to obtain more government contracts for the university, especially to bring a national accelerator laboratory there.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, on October 7, 1966, the Air Force announced that the University of Colorado had accepted the UFO study project and that Edward U. Condon would be in charge. With the announcement Condon named three other men to work on the project: assistant dean of the Graduate School and Psychology Professor Robert Low as project coordinator and psychologists Franklin Roach and Stuart Cook as principal investigators. The use of psychologists fulfilled the Air Force's requirement.<sup>50</sup> The program, the Denver Post reported, was "designed to quiet public fears of the aerial objects."<sup>51</sup>

Reactions to the announcement varied. On the favorable side was, first, the Denver Post, which said the decision was "wise" since the Air Force had not been able to satisfy the American people.<sup>52</sup> John Lear, in the Saturday Review, explained that, although he personally thought UFOs had something to do with "dying comets," the Condon committee would have a "fairer chance of clearing the air" of the bitterness that had developed over the UFO argument in recent years.<sup>53</sup> Two Colorado representatives were happy over the Air Force's selection of the university; they thought this proved that the University of Colorado "has the academic climate to satisfy and stimulate the scientific community" and that therefore the Atomic Energy Commission would be more prone to place the National Accelerator Laboratory in Colorado.<sup>54</sup> Hynek and Keyhoe, of course, were positive. Writing in the Saturday Evening Post, Hynek said that the establishment of the Condon committee gave him a feeling of "personal triumph and vindication"; he was especially happy that the committee would have enough time to review the phenomenon thoroughly, for he could not consider anyone an authority on the subject unless that person had read "at least a few

thousand original (not summary) reports" and studied the phenomenon's global nature.<sup>55</sup> Keyhoe called the establishment of the committee "the most significant development in the history of UFO investigation"; the study of UFOs, he said, is now in the hands of civilian scientists "where it belongs." NICAP also felt "vindicated" in its policies of pushing for congressional hearings and trying to end Air Force secrecy. Keyhoe said NICAP would refrain from criticizing the Air Force unless it "releases counter-to-fact explanations" of sightings or "false information" and that NICAP would help by giving the committee all "significant evidence."<sup>56</sup>

Not everyone was satisfied, however. Columnist Don Maclean charged, in a New Jersey newspaper, that the government was spending money to "check up" on another branch of the government--making the Condon committee "the most insulting thing that has happened to one of our armed services in some time."<sup>57</sup> Hollywood columnist Austin Connor suggested that the government was cheating the taxpayers: the Air Force, for legitimate reasons, would not give the committee all its classified files and, therefore, nothing would come of the UFO study.<sup>58</sup> An editorial in the Nation, which publicly had backed Condon's unsuccessful campaign for Regent, said: if Condon did not come up with anything other than "little green men," the UFO enthusiasts would crucify him; yet it hoped that the study could provide some useful results, such as insight about why people "must look to beings from beyond the earth as the only hope for escape from the tensions, dangers and boredom of modern life."<sup>59</sup> Robert Low, the project coordinator, also had reservations. He said the study did not fulfill the three criteria for acceptable research projects: teaching, research, and public service. But, he added, the University of Colorado was the only

institution that the Air Force asked to take the study and "'When you're asked to do something (as opposed to applying for it) you don't say no--not to the Air Force.'" He was confident that the study could produce some new knowledge in the behavioral sciences, through a study of people who reported UFOs.<sup>60</sup>

Soon after the committee's establishment, Condon started making statements that, at least to Keyhoe, McDonald, and others, seemed inconsistent with Condon's supposed impartiality and "open-mindedness." The day after his appointment he told a reporter for the Rocky Mountain News that there was "just no evidence that there is advanced life on other planets" and that he did not think flying saucers had visited the earth: "I haven't seen any convincing evidence. It is possible I suppose--but improbable. I would need a lot of convincing."<sup>61</sup> Condon thought the Air Force had been doing a good job of handling UFO reports. The next day he explained that the committee would do more than conduct field interviews with UFO witnesses; it would experiment with swamp gas and similar phenomena as well, to give the public a "better understanding of ordinary phenomena, which, if recognized at once, would reduce the number of UFO reports"; he suggested that this educational program could be accomplished through news media and school science classes.<sup>62</sup> A few days later, Condon wrote to the Denver Post explaining that the UFO project could make "valuable contributions to knowledge of atmospheric effects and of people's behavior observing them under unusual conditions." Because "well-known natural phenomena" caused the great majority of UFO reports, this "clearly indicates an appalling lack of public understanding of such phenomena [and] this calls for improved teaching about these things."<sup>63</sup> On October 30,

R. Roger Harkins, reporter for the Boulder Daily Camera, quoted Condon as saying the committee would use social psychologists to study large groups of people's reactions to "unusual stimuli"; this, Condon said, included the field of "rumor phenomena, as exemplified by the hysterical popular reaction to H. G. Welles' [sic] radio program, 'War of the Worlds,' in the late 1930's."<sup>64</sup> In a mid-November interview with a reporter from the New York Times, Condon confessed that he did not expect to find visitors from outer space "but I'm not against it . . . . After all that would be the discovery of a century--the discovery of many centuries--of the millennia, I suppose."<sup>65</sup> In a speech before the Corning Section of the American Chemical Society on January 25, 1967, Condon said: "It is my inclination right now to recommend that the government get out of this business. My attitude right now is that there's nothing to it." He added that "it would be a worthwhile study for those groups interested in meteorological phenomena."<sup>66</sup> Condon seemed to be headed toward studying misinterpretations of natural phenomena and the psychological bases for UFO reports.

Having decided to place the study of UFOs in a university, the Air Force thought this was the right time to proceed with its 1959 plan to transfer the UFO program out of the "intelligence community."<sup>67</sup> In June 1966 General James Ferguson, now Deputy Chief of Staff for Research and Development, assumed primary responsibility for the UFO program;<sup>68</sup> this move put Blue Book in the Air Force's scientific community, under the Foreign Technology Division of the Air Force Systems Command. The Air Force changed AFR 200-2 to AFR 80-17 (the 200 series refers to intelligence and the 80 series to "miscellaneous"), thereby formalizing the new arrangement and also allowing Blue Book to send UFO cases directly to the Condon committee.<sup>69</sup>

At this same time, 1966 to 1967, the public debate on UFOs became more serious than it had been before, for it was increasingly involved with professional people. John Fuller was mainly responsible for this. His articles in Saturday Review and Look contributed to widespread public interest in UFOs, and his book, Incident at Exeter, was sober, well-written, well-researched, and nonsensational. Because of Fuller's national reputation and the fact that he was not affiliated with any private UFO organizations, many people who previously had not been involved in the UFO debate expressed a favorable reaction to the book and its subject matter.<sup>70</sup> For instance, Oscar Handlin, professor of history at Harvard, in a review in the Atlantic Monthly, summed up the growing serious attitude toward UFOs: the answer to the UFO enigma was "not now knowable," he said; eyewitness testimony, the human eye being fallible, was not conclusive; yet because very little else existed to corroborate eyewitness testimony, "the confession of ignorance is the safest policy." Handlin attacked the Air Force for its "unwillingness . . . to concede that anything is 'unknown'" and for its "bland public relations assurances" which had "heightened popular anxiety." Although scientists were loath to admit the limits of their knowledge, Handlin said, "there is . . . nothing inherently implausible about extraterrestrial visitors"; intelligent life probably existed elsewhere in the universe and it might "be much more advanced than that on earth"; therefore, "to dismiss out of hand the evidence for UFOs will not quiet the fears that we may be living through the first stages of exploration from elsewhere."<sup>71</sup>

John Fuller's work in the UFO field provoked enough interest at Saturday Review for science editor John Lear to write a series of articles

about the Robertson Panel and the CIA's involvement with it. The Air Force let Lear look through its UFO files, except for the classified and uncensored version of the 1953 Robertson Panel report. Instead, it gave him an edited version of the report, leaving out the participants' names and the key recommendation that national security agencies should embark on a public education program to explain the dangers of reporting UFOs. The fact that the CIA had edited the document disturbed Lear. He compared the edited version with Ruppelt's 1956 version and, since Lear had no way of knowing what the CIA had edited out, he stated that a doubt would always remain about what the CIA had found as long as the Robertson Panel report was censored.<sup>72</sup> Concern over the exact contents of the Robertson report became more intense when Dr. James E. McDonald, the senior physicist at the University of Arizona's Institute of Atmospheric Physics, accidentally saw the classified version of the report at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. McDonald had been interested in the UFO phenomenon privately for the last few years; the 1965 sighting wave strengthened his growing conviction that the UFO phenomenon had scientific importance and that the extraterrestrial hypothesis was the answer to the mystery; by 1966 he was one of the nation's leading scientific authorities on UFOs and embarked on a national speaking tour to explain his views. After seeing the classified version of the Robertson Panel report, McDonald believed that the CIA was responsible for the Air Force's secrecy policies, and he resolved to make this information public. Speaking before members of the Arizona Meteorology Department, McDonald claimed that the CIA had ordered the Air Force to "debunk" UFOs, as seen in the unedited version of the Robertson report. The national news services picked up this story and publicized

it widely on the same day that the Air Force announced the establishment of the Condon committee.<sup>73</sup>

Many of the professionals who became interested in the UFO phenomenon were scientists. Dr. Frank Salisbury, head of the Plant Science Department at Utah State University, Dr. Leo Sprinkle, psychologist at the University of Wyoming, Stanton Friedman, a nuclear physicist at Westinghouse Laboratories, Jacques Vallee, a mathematician at Northwestern University and other scientists who had not been involved in the UFO controversy before now aligned themselves with the view that UFOs merited scientific study and that the extraterrestrial hypothesis might be valid. This new scientific interest probably was in part due to the establishment of the Condon committee. Condon's prestige was so great that he "legitimized" the subject and made it easier for scientists to discuss the matter without fearing as much ridicule as they had before 1966 (although ridicule still persisted). Condon's stature and Hynek's vigorous public statements about UFOs came together in October 1966, when Science magazine (the official organ of the American Association for the Advancement of Science) printed a letter Hynek had written in August 1966. Science at first had refused to publish the letter but changed its policy and published it in abridged form after Condon agreed to take the UFO project.<sup>74</sup>

Since the Lonnie Zamora sighting in 1964, Hynek had become more determined in his request for a "respectable scholarly study of the UFO phenomenon." Furthermore, the swamp gas incident placed him in a defensive position, and the result in 1966 was a more "liberal" view toward UFOs. Hynek's letter to Science was his most forthright statement to date. His main purpose was to refute several common misconceptions about the

phenomenon. "Truly puzzling" reports came not from UFO "buffs," he said, but from people who gave little or no thought to the subject previous to a sighting. Second, although unreliable, unstable, or uneducated people did generate some UFO reports, Hynek explained, "the most articulate reports come from obviously intelligent people"; moreover, the notion that scientifically-trained people did not report UFOs was "unequivocally false" and, in fact, some of the best reports came from this group. Hynek's third point was that, contrary to popular opinion, UFOs were seen at close range and reported explicitly and in detail. As for the Air Force statement that it had no evidence that UFOs were extraterrestrial or represented advanced technology, Hynek said this was true but it "is widely interpreted to mean that there is evidence against the two hypotheses. As long as there are 'unidentifieds,' the question must obviously remain open."

Fifth, Hynek countered the commonly held notion that publicity generated UFO reports: while it was true that widely-publicized reports might stimulate other reports, "it is unwarranted to assert that this is the sole cause of high incidence of UFO reports." Finally, in answer to the charge that neither radar nor meteor and satellite tracking cameras picked up UFOs, Hynek said these instruments had tracked "oddities" that remained unidentified. For these reasons, Hynek said, he could not "dismiss the UFO phenomenon with a shrug"; twentieth century scientists tended to forget "that there will be a 21st-century science, and indeed, a 30th-century science, from which vantage points our knowledge of the universe may appear quite different." He concluded that "we suffer, perhaps, from temporal provincialism, a form of arrogance that has always irritated posterity."<sup>75</sup>

Hynek's letter was just one example of scientists speaking out about the phenomenon. Condon reported receiving many letters from scientists volunteering to help the committee and none ridiculing him for accepting the project.<sup>76</sup> But some scientists persisted in ridiculing UFOs and the people who reported seeing them. Dr. Edward Teller, on a nationwide broadcast of CBS' Face the Nation, said that UFOs were "miracles" and, as he explained, "the human soul needs a miracle"; given a scientific age, "what is more proper than that the miracles should be scientific miracles?"<sup>77</sup> British astronomer Sir Bernard Lovell, on an American speaking tour, explained that people who reported UFOs were "tremendous emotionalists"; UFOs were nothing but natural phenomena and hoaxes, and the entire subject was "incredible nonsense."<sup>78</sup> Science fiction writer Isaac Asimov made the common mistake of not understanding the distinction between what contactees reported and what reputable witnesses reported; he was convinced that "most flying saucer enthusiasts" believed that "spaceship-crews are benevolent guardians of our welfare and anxious to keep us from destroying ourselves in nuclear warfare." According to Asimov, people who believed in the extraterrestrial origin of UFOs were "clinging to a fantasy."<sup>79</sup>

Nonetheless, other scientists who were sceptical about the standing of the subject offered reasoned arguments based on some knowledge of UFOs and related fields. Philip Klass, editor of Aviation Week, added a new dimension to the scientific inquiry into the nature of the phenomenon when he proposed that ball lightning or plasmas caused UFOs. He expanded his theories into a book, UFOs--Identified.<sup>80</sup> Basically, Klass believed that virtually all UFO sightings were due to coronal discharges--the

result of free floating packets of charged air which a lightning bolt had ignited; this phenomenon occurs most often near high voltage power lines. Klass's theory was based on his reading of Incident at Exeter, in which many of the witnesses told of seeing UFOs near high tension wires. Klass was certain he had found the solution to the UFO mystery: plasmas could cause automobile engine failure, appear luminous, hover, and create radar-echoes. Many magazines and newspapers featured articles about the plasma idea.<sup>81</sup> While admitting that plasmas might account for a few UFO reports, most UFO researchers--including Hynek, McDonald, Richard Hall of NICAP, and some electrical engineers--discounted the Klass theory as a "solution" because it did not explain the majority of UFO sightings. Because plasmas at most existed for a few seconds only near high tension lines in a severe thunderstorm with lightning, the researchers said, the theory did not account for sightings not in the area of high power lines, that occurred in fair weather, and that lasted longer than a few seconds.<sup>82</sup>

Similarly, Marquette University Physics Professor William Markowitz found a solution to the mystery by studying how the objects moved. In a 1967 article in Science, "The Physics and Metaphysics of Unidentified Flying Objects," Markowitz discussed the idea that reported UFO maneuvers did not obey the "elemental laws of celestial mechanics and physics." He constructed a theoretical model, based on known laws, of the physics of interstellar space travel, giving special attention to takeoffs and landings. He found that reports of UFO takeoffs and landings did not conform with this model and that, therefore, extraterrestrial space vehicles did not account for the phenomenon. Markowitz concluded that because there were no valid reports of occupant sightings and no crashed UFOs, he doubted

extraterrestrial visitation. Furthermore, he said, in light of the fact that the data on extraterrestrial visitation was so meager, people should not waste time studying it and the Air Force should terminate its investigation activities. He had mentioned this prospect to Quintanilla, Markowitz said, and the Major "raised no objections."<sup>83</sup> This article provoked a lively response from the readers of Science. Richard J. Rosa, of the Avco Everett Research Laboratory, agreed with Markowitz' conclusion but found the argument "irrelevant"; although interstellar travel was impossible for our society now, Rosa said, Markowitz' arguments "in no way prove or imply that it is beyond someone else's--or . . . what we will have 100 years from now."<sup>84</sup> William T. Powers, a friend of Hynek from Northwestern University's Dearborn Observatory, said Markowitz' argument "bears no relationship to the contents of UFO reports"; his model for space flight was foolish and all he proved is that "his own design does not explain reports of takeoffs or landings." Furthermore, Powers stated, "the contrast between the notion of an advanced civilization's mode of transport (as one may legitimately attempt to imagine it) and Markowitz' sketchy design for a starship is ludicrous."<sup>85</sup> Jacques Vallee, one of Hynek's colleagues at Northwestern and the author of two books (1965 and 1966) on UFOs, charged that Markowitz deliberately selected "borderline cases in an effort to cast doubt on the validity of current official and private attempts at data-gathering." Furthermore, Vallee insisted, being concerned with only one idea--the extraterrestrial hypothesis--as Markowitz was, meant that one had to "abandon entirely the rational process upon which science is based." The argument, Vallee concluded, was "grossly irrational."<sup>86</sup>

Although the scientific debate focused, in large part, on finding answers for or alternatives to the extraterrestrial hypothesis, some scientists took a "middle of the road" position. Dr. Carl Sagan was representative of this view. Sagan was an astronomy professor at Cornell University and also had been a member of the Ad Hoc Committee to Review Project Blue Book (the O'Brien committee). He believed, on the one hand, in the possibility that extraterrestrial visitors had journeyed to Earth in prehistoric times. Although highly unlikely and seemingly fantastic, this possibility existed, he said, and scientists should examine closely ancient myths and legends for possible extraterrestrial contact.<sup>87</sup> On the other hand, Sagan thought that the prospect of extraterrestrial visitation to contemporary civilization was dim: scientists had obtained no photographs of UFOs as they had of meteors and the majority of sightings were actually common astronomic objects of atmospheric phenomena. Although "no unambiguous evidence" for even simple forms of extraterrestrial life existed, Sagan said, "the situation may change in the coming years." Therefore, Sagan warned scientists who had "a tendency to reject out of hand the possibility of extraterrestrial intelligence as baseless, improbable or unscientific" to avoid this "danger."<sup>88</sup> Hynek, too, was in this "camp." He neither denied nor supported any theory; rather, he spent much of 1966 and 1967 calling for increased scientific scrutiny of the UFO problem because "no truly scientific investigation of the UFO phenomenon has ever been undertaken."<sup>89</sup> Much of this Hynek did through the media: the letter in Science in October 1966, an article about the Air Force study and his involvement in the Saturday Evening Post in December, 1966, a full-page interview with Hynek in the Christian Science Monitor in May 1967, and

an article discussing the inadequacies of the Air Force program in Playboy in December 1967. In the latter, Hynek outlined the dangers of the Russians deciphering the UFO mystery before the Americans could and recommended increased study to avoid a "UFO gap." If the United States could do this, wrote Hynek, "mankind may be in for the greatest adventure since dawning human intelligence turned outward to contemplate the universe."<sup>90</sup>

If Sagan and Hynek were the spokesmen for the middle position, Dr. James McDonald certainly was the advocate for the extraterrestrial position. Not afraid of ridicule, he stumped the country discussing his theories. In a debate with Menzel and Quintanilla before the American Association of Newspaper Editors in Washington, D.C., McDonald called the UFO mystery the "greatest scientific problem of our times." He attacked the Air Force for its lack of scientific investigation and its pronouncements designed to soothe the public and the CIA for its involvement in the Robertson panel report. While not believing in Keyhoe's conspiracy ideas, McDonald did believe that the Air Force had been involved in a "grand foulup" because of the "limited scientific competence" of the personnel attached to the UFO section. McDonald's opinion of the UFO enigma was that "the extraterrestrial hypothesis [was] the only presently plausible explanation for the now-available facts." McDonald was careful to state that this was only a hypothesis and could be rejected if the facts warranted it.<sup>91</sup>

As a result of this scientific debate and the opposing positions, the American Institute of Astronautics and Aeronautics (AIAA) decided to convene a panel of scientists for an unbiased discussion of the UFO problem. Joachim P. Kuettner of the Environmental Research Laboratories in Boulder,

Colorado, chaired the eleven-member panel, which hoped to reach some conclusions before 1969.<sup>92</sup> Clearly, the events from 1965 to 1967 opened wider the door to scientific inquiry than ever before.

The events of 1965 to 1967 not only increased scientists' interest in UFOs but public interest in the various UFO organizations and clubs as well. The private UFO groups enjoyed increased memberships; Peter Bail in the New York Times reported that membership in the UFO organizations was "soaring" and that "predictably the number of sightings of 'saucers' seemed to be growing apace." He reported that NICAP had doubled its membership to 11,000 and that the Amalgamated Flying Saucer Clubs of America (the California-based contactee group) claimed 3,700 members.<sup>93</sup> George Van Tassel's contactee convention at Giant Rock, Arizona, drew crowds of at least 2,000--more than double what it had drawn in previous years.<sup>94</sup> Hector Quintanilla's analysis of this new interest in UFOs was that it was due to an "upsurge in magazine stories and television shows devoted to the topic."<sup>95</sup>

The Air Force received nearly 3,000 sighting reports from 1965 through 1967. Public interest in them and massive publicity had finally forced a congressional hearing on UFOs which, in turn, compelled the Air Force to look for outside aid in dealing with the UFO problem. Finding the University of Colorado and especially Edward U. Condon to direct the civilian study made UFOs a more legitimate area of study for some members of the scientific community. The spokesmen for the private UFO groups seemed less vocal, prominent professional people, such as Hynek and Sagan, more vocal, and many previously hostile sectors of the society began to treat the subject seriously. Thus, although hostility was still prevalent,

a growing number of scientists took a closer look at the UFO phenomenon during these years and independently concluded that the topic had scientific merit. As the UFO debate moved away from in-group and public relations haggling and toward the scientific community, the Condon committee's work became, necessarily, the focal point of attention. Many scientists as well as UFO proponents adopted a "wait-and-see" attitude before judging the work of this first civilian scientific investigation of the UFO phenomenon. The Condon committee assumed paramount importance, and, eventually, most concerned citizens and scientists looked to it to give them "the answer" to the problem.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Herbert Strentz, "A Survey of Press Coverage of Unidentified Flying Objects, 1947-1966" (Diss. Northwestern University 1970), p. 47.

<sup>2</sup>Evening Post (Charleston, South Carolina), 16 July 1965.

<sup>3</sup>Sentinel (Orlando, Florida), 21 September 1965, p. 13-b; Star Telegram (Fort Worth), News Leader (Richmond, Virginia), and Times-Star (Alameda, California) in Sentinel (Orlando, Florida), 21 September 1965, p. 13-b.

<sup>4</sup>Christian Science Monitor, 16 August 1965, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup>Christian Science Monitor, 21 August 1965, p. E1.

<sup>6</sup>Christian Science Monitor, 3 September 1965, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup>Edward U. Condon, project director, Scientific Study of Unidentified Flying Objects (New York: Bantam, 1969), p. 514.

<sup>8</sup>Valley Times (San Fernando, California), 4 August 1965.

<sup>9</sup>Wall Street Journal, 13 December 1965, pp. 1, 20.

<sup>10</sup>John Fuller, "Tradewinds: Report of an Unidentified Flying Object in Exeter, N.H.," Saturday Review, 2 October 1965, p. 10.

<sup>11</sup>John Fuller, Incident at Exeter (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1966), passim.

<sup>12</sup>John Fuller, "Tradewinds: Exeter People Give Accounts of Observations," Saturday Review, 22 January 1966, p. 14; John Fuller, "Incident at Exeter," Look, 22 February 1966.

<sup>13</sup>John Fuller, "Tradewinds: U.S. Air Force's Reactions to Recent Sightings," Saturday Review, 16 April 1966, p. 10.

<sup>14</sup>UFO Investigator, III (January-February 1966), 5.

<sup>15</sup>UFO Investigator, III (January-February 1966), 5-6.

<sup>16</sup>J. Allen Hynek, The UFO Experience: A Scientific Inquiry (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1972), p. 198.

<sup>17</sup>General E. B. LeBailly, Memorandum for Military Director, Scientific Advisory Board, "Unidentified Flying Objects (UFOs)," 28 September 1965 (in the files at the Air Force Archives at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama, to which I will hereafter refer as MAFB); also contained in Condon, pp. 816-817.

<sup>18</sup>"Special Report of the USAF Scientific Advisory Board Ad Hoc Committee to Review Project 'Blue Book'," March 1966, pp. 1-9 (MAFB and in Condon, pp. 811-815).

<sup>19</sup>Gallup Political Index, Report No. 11, April 1966 (American Institute of Public Opinion), p. 13. See also George H. Gallup, The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971, 2 (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 2004.

<sup>20</sup>New York Times, 23 March 1966, p. 22.

<sup>21</sup>For a good summary of this sighting, see: "Well-Witnessed Invasion by Something: Australia to Michigan," Life, 1 April 1966, pp. 24-31.

<sup>22</sup>J. Allen Hynek, "Are Flying Saucers Real?," Saturday Evening Post, 17 December 1966, p. 20.

<sup>23</sup>David R. Saunders and R. Roger Harkins, UFOs? Yes! (New York: Signet, 1968), p. 61.

<sup>24</sup>Hynek, Saturday Evening Post, 17 December 1966, p. 20.

<sup>25</sup>Strentz, "A Survey of Press Coverage of UFOs," p. 52.

<sup>26</sup>Life, 1 April 1966, pp. 24-31.

<sup>27</sup>"Notes and Comments: Saucer Flap," New Yorker, 9 April 1966, p. 33.

<sup>28</sup>"Fatuus Season: Ann Arbor and Hillsdale Sightings," Time, 1 April 1966, p. 25B.

<sup>29</sup>Wisconsin State Journal, 26 March 1966, p. 1, and 29 March 1966 (private clipping).

<sup>30</sup>New York Times, 27 March 1966, Pt. 4, p. 2 and p. 61.

<sup>31</sup>New York Times, 23 March 1966, p. 43.

<sup>32</sup>Christian Science Monitor, 30 March 1966, p. 24.

<sup>33</sup>Christian Science Monitor, 11 April 1966, p. 16.

<sup>34</sup>New York Times, 26 March 1966, p. 31.

<sup>35</sup>Gerald Ford to L. Mendel Rivers, 28 March 1966, in U.S. House, Committee on Armed Services, Hearings, Unidentified Flying Objects, 89th Cong. 2nd Sess., April 5, 1966, pp. 6046-6047. I will refer to this hereafter as Hearings.

<sup>36</sup>News (Detroit), 30 March 1966, p. 10.

<sup>37</sup>Hearings, pp. 6011-6042.

<sup>38</sup>Hearings, pp. 5991-6005.

<sup>39</sup>Hearings, pp. 6007-6008.

<sup>40</sup>Hearings, p. 6045.

<sup>41</sup>Hearings, pp. 6069-6074.

<sup>42</sup>Lt. Colonel Harold A. Steiner, Memorandum for the Record, "Implementing SAB Ad Hoc Committee on Project Blue Book Recommendations," 20 April 1966 (MAFB).

<sup>43</sup>U.S. House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Hearings, Foreign Assistance Act of 1966, 89th Cong. 2nd Sess., March 30, 1966, pp. 330, 332.

<sup>44</sup>Steiner, Memorandum for the Record, "Implementing SAB Ad Hoc Committee on Project Blue Book Recommendations," 20 April 1966, pp. 1, 2 (MAFB).

<sup>45</sup>Lt. Colonel Robert R. Hippler, Memorandum for the Record, "Scientific Panel to Investigate Reported Sightings of Unidentified Flying Objects (UFOs)," 22 April 1966 (MAFB).

<sup>46</sup>Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), "Air Force to Contract with Scientists for UFO Investigations," 9 May 1966 (MAFB).

<sup>47</sup>Most of the information for the following section on placing the Colorado project was obtained from Saunders and Harkins, UFOs? Yes!, pp. 25-29.

<sup>48</sup>Saunders and Harkins, pp. 29, 28, 29.

<sup>49</sup>Nation, 26 September 1966, p. 269.

<sup>50</sup>Denver Post, 7 October 1966, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup>Denver Post, 6 October 1966, p. 1, 19; see also New York Times, 14 August 1966, p. 1, 70.

<sup>52</sup>Denver Post, 7 October 1966, p. 22.

<sup>53</sup>John Lear, "Research in America: Dr. Condon's Study Outlined," Saturday Review, 3 December 1966, p. 87.

<sup>54</sup>Denver Post, 7 October 1966, p. 3.

<sup>55</sup>Hynek, Saturday Evening Post, pp. 17-21.

<sup>56</sup>UFO Investigator, III (October-November 1966), 2.

<sup>57</sup>Hudson Dispatch (Union City, New Jersey), 21 October 1966 (from the files of the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena, Washington, D.C., to which I will hereafter refer as NICAP).

<sup>58</sup>Citizen-News (Hollywood, California), 27 October 1966, p. A-2.

<sup>59</sup>"Can Dr. Condon See It Through?," Nation, 31 October 1966, p. 436. See also "Condon for Regent," Nation, 26 September 1966, p. 269.

<sup>60</sup>Denver Post, 9 October 1966, p. 29.

<sup>61</sup>Rocky Mountain News (Denver), 8 October 1966. See also Denver Post, 8 October 1966, p. 26.

<sup>62</sup>Denver Post, 9 October 1966, p. 47.

<sup>63</sup>Denver Post, 11 October 1966, p. 21.

<sup>64</sup>Daily Camera (Boulder, Colorado), 30 October 1966, p. 1, 6.

<sup>65</sup>New York Times, 16 November 1966, p. 28.

<sup>66</sup>Star-Gazette (Elmira, New York), 26 January 1967 (NICAP).

<sup>67</sup>Lt. Colonel Robert R. Hippler, Memorandum for the Record, "Scientific Panel to Investigate Reported Sightings of Unidentified Flying Objects," 22 April 1966 (MAFB).

<sup>68</sup>Colonel Raymond S. Sleeper, Deputy Chief of Staff for Foreign Technology, to Foreign Technology Division, "Scientific Panel Investigation of Unidentified Flying Objects," 2 June 1966 (MAFB).

<sup>69</sup>U.S. Air Force, "Air Force Regulation 80-17," 19 September 1966, contained in Condon, pp. 819-828.

<sup>70</sup>See Walter Sullivan's review in the New York Times, 27 August 1966, p. 27; Daniel Cohen, "Review of Incident at Exeter," Science Digest, October 1966, pp. 42-44; "Heavenly Bogeys," Time, 2 September 1966, pp. 81-82.

<sup>71</sup>Oscar Handlin, "Readers Choice," Atlantic Monthly, CCXVIII (August 1966), 117.

<sup>72</sup>John Lear, "The Disputed CIA Document on UFOs," Saturday Review, 3 September 1966, pp. 45-50.

<sup>73</sup>New York Times, 21 October 1966, p. 9; Denver Post, 9 October 1966, p. 29.

<sup>74</sup>"UFO's For Real?," Newsweek, 10 October 1966, p. 70.

<sup>75</sup>J. Allen Hynek, "UFOs Merit Scientific Study," Science, 21 October 1966, p. 329.

<sup>76</sup>New York Times, 16 November 1966, p. 28.

<sup>77</sup>New York Times, 4 April 1966, p. 33.

<sup>78</sup>Christian Science Monitor, 21 April 1966, p. 18.

<sup>79</sup>Isaac Asimov, "UFOs--What I Think," Science Digest, June 1966, p. 47.

<sup>80</sup>Philip J. Klass, "Plasma Theory May Explain Many UFOs," Aviation Week, 22 August 1966, pp. 48-50+; Klass, "Many UFOs Are Identified as Plasmas," Aviation Week, 3 October 1966, pp. 54-55+; Klass, UFOs--Identified (New York: Random House, 1968).

<sup>81</sup>New York Times, 23 August 1966, p. 36; John Lear, "Scientific Explanation for the UFOs?," Saturday Review, 1 October 1966, pp. 67-69; "Great Balls of Fire," Newsweek, 5 September 1966, p. 78; "Management Newsletter," Electrical World, 15 April 1968, pp. 57-60; Chicago Tribune, 9 October 1966, pp. 1B, 2B; "UFOs or Kugelblitz?," Popular Electronics, September 1966, p. 84.

<sup>82</sup>For critiques of Klass's theory, see: James McDonald, Unidentified Flying Objects: Greatest Scientific Problem of Our Times, Presentation to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, April 1966 (Washington, D.C.: Pittsburgh Subcommittee of NICAP, 1967; published at the author's request); Chicago Tribune, 9 October 1966, pp. 1B, 2B. For electrical engineers' critique, see: "Management Newsletter," Electrical World, 15 April 1968, pp. 57-60. Also see Richard Hall's letter to the editor, Aviation Week, 10 October 1966, p. 130.

<sup>83</sup>William Markowitz, "The Physics and Metaphysics of Unidentified Flying Objects," Science, 15 September 1967, pp. 1274-1279.

<sup>84</sup>Richard J. Rosa, "Letters," Science, 8 December 1967, p. 1265.

<sup>85</sup>William T. Powers, "Letters," Science, 8 December 1967, p. 1265.

<sup>86</sup>Jacques Vallee, "Letters," Science, 8 December 1967, p. 1266.

<sup>87</sup>Carl Sagan and I. S. Shklovskii, Intelligent Life in the Universe (San Francisco: Holden-Day, 1966). See also John Lear, "What Are the Unidentified Aerial Objects?," Saturday Review, 6 August 1966, pp. 41-49.

<sup>88</sup>Carl Sagan, "The Saucerian Cult," Saturday Review, 6 August 1966, pp. 50-52.

<sup>89</sup>Hynek, Science, 21 October 1966, p. 329.

<sup>90</sup>J. Allen Hynek, "White Paper on UFOs," Christian Science Monitor, 23 May 1967, p. 9; Hynek, "The UFO Gap," Playboy, December 1967, pp. 143-146, 267, 269-271.

<sup>91</sup>McDonald, pp. 6, 11, 17.

<sup>92</sup>See "AIAA Committee Looks at UFO Problem," Astronautics and Aeronautics, December 1968, p. 12; "Background," Astronautics and Aeronautics, November 1970, p. 51. I will discuss the AIAA's conclusions and recommendations in Chapter IX.

<sup>93</sup>New York Times, 16 November 1966, p. 28.

<sup>94</sup>"Out of This World: Convention of the Amalgamated Flying Saucer Clubs of America," Newsweek, 7 November 1966, p. 38.

<sup>95</sup>New York Times, 16 November 1966, p. 28.

## CHAPTER IX

## THE CONDON COMMITTEE AND ITS AFTERMATH

The establishment of the Condon committee was the culmination of years of pressure from Keyhoe, Hynek, private UFO groups, Congress, and the news media. Because the committee was university-based and not under military control, because it was composed of people trained in the physical and social sciences, and because its purpose was a long-term and in-depth study of the UFO phenomenon, it assumed extraordinary importance for people on all sides of the UFO controversy. But the committee, which fell prey to internal divisions, methodological disputes, and personality clashes, did not resolve or clarify most of the issues surrounding the UFO controversy. In fact, its final report raised more questions than it answered. Although the Condon committee was successful in helping the Air Force eliminate its "UFO problem," the committee failed to add substantially to knowledge about the phenomenon.

The Condon committee began its work in October 1966 with optimism on all sides. Even though no one connected with the project had any prior experience in the field, the staff of twelve--including psychologists David Saunders and Stuart Cook, chemist Roy Craig, astronomer Franklin Roach, and project coordinator Robert Low--formulated workable plans to attack the UFO problem on many fronts. The staff planned to keep a "case book" of the best available sightings, and Saunders was to conduct a statistical study of them. The staff compiled a library containing most

of the important works on the subject. It planned to create investigation teams to study sightings as soon as they occurred. Psychologist William Scott began work on a standard questionnaire that would gather information about sightings and their witnesses. Condon hired outside consultants to write reports about physical phenomena--such as ball lightning and plasmas--associated with UFO sightings.<sup>1</sup> To orient project members about problems in UFO research, the staff brought in Hynek, French UFO researcher and mathematician Jacques Vallee, Project Blue Book head Major Hector Quintanilla, Keyhoe, and NICAP assistant director Richard Hall.<sup>2</sup>

Trouble developed almost as soon as the first rush of optimism faded. David Saunders outlined the problems in a 1968 book about the early Condon committee's problems. According to Saunders, one of the first disagreements was over Scott's questionnaire: of its twenty-one pages, only one was devoted to items about the sighting itself; the remaining twenty pages asked questions about the psychological reactions of the witnesses. Some staff members objected to this method and Scott resigned.<sup>3</sup> A second problem centered on project coordinator Robert Low who, Saunders said, seemed insensitive to the project members' work. He preoccupied himself with adding cases to his "case book," cases that Saunders later charged were improperly screened and analyzed and that only increased the projected length of the final report. In August 1967 Low went to Europe for a month's stay. With support from Saunders and other staff members, Low's purpose was to represent the project at the International Astronomical Union in Prague; this, the staff thought, would be an excellent opportunity for Low to meet with two of Europe's leading UFO researchers: Charles Bowen of England and Aime Michel of France. Low,

however, decided not to visit Bowen and Michel and went instead to Loch Ness; the reason he gave was that, although neither UFOs nor the monster existed, it was important to compare the two phenomena.<sup>4</sup>

A third source of irritation was Condon's attitudes. Early in the project, on January 25, 1967, he spoke to the Corning Section of the American Chemical Society (in Corning, New York) and said the government should get out of the UFO "business" and there was nothing to the UFO phenomenon. Saunders explained that not only were some project staff members upset and puzzled over the speech but that it almost caused a break with NICAP. Some NICAP members thought the speech was proof of both Condon's bias and the Air Force's influence and put pressure on Keyhoe to withdraw support. The Condon committee needed NICAP's help, for it supplied the project with the best sighting reports. The Air Force was inefficient; Blue Book personnel had misfiled and misplaced many reports and Air Base officers sent reports slowly and contributed many of low quality. Saunders, who joined NICAP to keep up with current sightings when the university accepted the UFO project, found that NICAP reports were of a higher quality than those of the Air Force.<sup>5</sup> Under Saunders' urging and with much reluctance, Condon wrote to Keyhoe explaining that the press had misquoted what he said at Corning and managed to head off a serious problem with NICAP.<sup>6</sup> Condon had problems concealing his "negative" attitude toward UFOs. He showed a distinct partiality to contactee-type claims--claims that serious UFO investigators viewed as hoaxes. Not only did these stories provide Condon with excellent after-dinner anecdotes, but they occupied an unusually large portion of his project efforts as well. Of the four or five cases he personally investigated, all

were either hoaxes or had contactee overtones. In addition, he made a special trip to New York City in June 1967 to appear at a meeting of the contactee-oriented Congress of Scientific Ufologists, where Howard Menger was the guest speaker; Condon took a bow in the audience.<sup>7</sup> The project staff was not happy with this behavior.

A major source of conflict, beginning as early as January 1967, was the validity of the extraterrestrial hypothesis. Saunders rapidly emerged as the champion of the idea that the committee should consider the extraterrestrial hypothesis equally with other theories. Psychologist Michael Wertheimer and Low took the position that the extraterrestrial hypothesis was not only unprovable but probably absurd as well. A dispute over this point ensued between Saunders and Low and Wertheimer; as a result, Wertheimer lost interest in the project and participated only minimally. But Low and Saunders continued at odds over the issue, and in March 1967 Low wrote a "position paper" in which he said the extraterrestrial hypothesis was nonsense.<sup>8</sup> He maintained this attitude until the end of the project.

The disagreement over the extraterrestrial hypothesis indicated deeper disputes within the committee. One concerned the committee's policy of releasing no information to the press before it completed the final report. Condon and Low had instituted this policy, the one exception being any public remarks Condon might make, but Saunders disagreed with it. For Saunders the policy seemed to bear directly on the committee's scientific intent. He hoped and perhaps assumed that the staff would find at least several "solid" cases to support the "positive" recommendation for continued scientific study of UFOs; he had found

some sightings he thought were solid, one being the 1950 Nicholas Mariana film. For Saunders, the implication of such a "positive" recommendation was that UFOs were a unique phenomenon and the extraterrestrial hypothesis might have merit. Therefore, he reasoned, the committee should release selected information to the public to soften the shock of this kind of recommendation. But Condon, also assuming that a "positive" report would mean that the extraterrestrial hypothesis had merit, refused to change the policy; if a positive final report seemed likely, he explained, he would not release the information to the press but would take it personally to the President of the United States. Saunders interpreted this statement to mean that no matter what the staff found the final report would be "negative," that the report would not recommend continued study because the idea that UFOs represented a unique phenomenon of possible extraterrestrial origin had no validity.<sup>9</sup>

While this dispute simmered beneath the surface, a second issue emerged which unquestionably became the project's most dramatic by-product--the release of a document called the Low Memorandum.<sup>10</sup> In August 1966, as people at the University of Colorado tried to decide whether to accept the UFO project, Low wrote a memorandum to university administrators explaining his views. In it he dealt with the question of what could be the final result of the study. The memorandum, ambiguously and loosely worded, expressed the basic premise that UFOs were not a unique phenomenon, that they had no "physical reality" and were not extraterrestrial in origin. But, Low stated, even though the staff would be composed of "non-believers"--people who assumed that UFOs were not a unique phenomenon--it was practically impossible to prove this assumption. The staff could,

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however, collect an impressive body of evidence to bolster this common-sense assumption. Such bolstering, Low cautioned, might involve a public relations dilemma in which "the trick would be to describe the project so that, to the public, it would appear a totally objective study but, to the scientific community, would present the image of a group of non-believers trying their best to be objective but having an almost zero expectation of finding a saucer." Low decided that the best way to accomplish this dual objective would be to stress the investigation of "the psychology and sociology of persons and groups who report seeing UFOs." By placing emphasis on the witnesses, Low said, "rather than on examination of the old question of the physical reality of the saucer, I think the scientific community would quickly get the message."<sup>11</sup>

The Low Memorandum found its way to a file marked "AF Contract and Background" where it sat, as Saunders said, "ticking away like a time bomb" until July 1967 when staff member Roy Craig discovered it.<sup>12</sup> Puzzled over its contents, Craig showed it to Norman Levine who showed it to Saunders. Saunders then showed the memorandum to Keyhoe. He wanted Keyhoe to know about Low's apparent bias and also to continue cooperating with the project so that Saunders would have data to write a minority report. Keyhoe, in turn, showed it to McDonald because of the latter's interest in the extraterrestrial hypothesis. All this went on without Low's knowledge. No one brought up the memorandum until February 1968 when McDonald wrote a seven-page letter to Low criticizing the project's methodology and expressing concern over the "negative" conclusion to which the project seemed headed. In the letter McDonald mentioned the memorandum, quoting the section about "the trick would be . . . ."<sup>13</sup> Low became

exceptionally upset and showed Condon McDonald's letter. Condon, who had not known about the memorandum until this time, was even more disturbed and accused Saunders and Levine of stealing the letter from Low's personal files and releasing it to McDonald; Condon told Saunders he ought to be "professionally ruined" for leaking the memorandum. The next day Condon fired Saunders and Levine.<sup>14</sup> Their dismissal brought other staff problems to the fore. Condon's administrative assistant, Mary Lou Armstrong, resigned, citing "an almost unanimous 'lack of confidence'" in Low's ability to direct the project. She also accused Low of misrepresenting the majority of the senior staff's opinion, which was that the UFO phenomenon deserved further scientific study.<sup>15</sup>

The Low Memorandum and Condon's handling of it reflected the philosophical divisions in the project and the conflicts among staff members. Condon was not able to maintain a continuous project staff; only Low and two other full-time staff members, out of the twelve, remained with the project for its duration.<sup>16</sup> Much of the personal conflict was based on a philosophical issue--what assumption to make in investigating cases. Neither of the two groups involved saw the primary focus as being to determine whether UFOs constituted a unique phenomenon. Instead, one group, with Saunders as spokesman, thought the committee should consider the extraterrestrial hypothesis and other theories about the origin of UFOs; this group wanted to look at as much of the physical evidence as possible. The other group, with Low as spokesman, thought the extraterrestrial theory was nonsense and believed the solution to the UFO mystery was to be found in the psychological makeup of the witnesses. The main conflict was over whether UFOs were an extraterrestrial phenomenon

rather than whether they constituted a unique aerial phenomenon. Perhaps the reason why the two groups confused the UFO problem with the extra-terrestrial hypothesis was that none of the project staff had any experience in investigating UFO reports. Even though Condon asked Hynek, Keyhoe, and Jacques Vallee at the beginning to brief the project staff on problems in UFO research, he did not use these men as consultants for the project's methodology. Therefore, its methodological questions led the staff members to tangential concerns.

Disclosure of the Low Memorandum became the central event in the Condon committee's stormy history. Journalist John Fuller found out about the firings soon after they occurred and in May 1968 wrote an article, "Flying Saucer Fiasco," for Look magazine. Fuller discussed the divisions in the project, Condon's seeming preoccupation with contactees, the Low Memorandum, McDonald's letter to Low, Saunders' and Levine's firing, and Mary Lou Armstrong's subsequent resignation. To Fuller these events meant that "the hope that the establishment of the Colorado study brought with it has dimmed. All that seems to be left is the \$500,000 trick."<sup>17</sup> Condon sent a telegram to Look charging that the Fuller article contained "falsehoods, and misrepresentations" but not specifying what they were. The Denver Post quoted Mary Lou Armstrong as saying the article was "accurate."<sup>18</sup> In addition to the article, Look printed a short piece Keyhoe had written to say that NICAP had withdrawn its support from the Condon committee. NICAP had been wavering about continuing its support even before the Low disclosure; and, although Saunders encouraged Keyhoe to withhold judgment, Keyhoe knew about some of the project's difficulties and became increasingly wary of its "objectivity." The dismissals

convinced him that his fears were justified; he could see the direction the project was taking and wanted no part of it. (He actually had withdrawn support before the Look article but made his decision public in the magazine.)<sup>19</sup>

Fuller's article had far-reaching effects. Technical and professional journals carried the story and opened a forum for debate. In an interview with Scientific Research, Saunders and Levine said they were planning a libel suit against Condon and attacked him for an "'unscientific' approach" to the study.<sup>20</sup> In reply, Condon said calling him "unscientific" was grounds for libel and that "one factor" in dismissing Saunders and Levine was that they gave "outsiders" material from "personal" files. Until the final report became available to the public in the fall of 1968, Condon said, "fair-minded people will reserve judgment."<sup>21</sup> Industrial Research printed excerpts from the "stolen" Low Memorandum, as Condon called it, and a statement from Thomas Ratchford of the Air Force Office of Scientific Research. He said it was "inappropriate and premature" for the Air Force to comment on the matter until the Condon committee completes the final report. But, asserted Ratchford, he believed Condon to be "outstandingly open-minded" and unbiased.<sup>22</sup>

Science magazine's news department was working on an article about the project's problems and Condon agreed to cooperate with the author--hoping that this would be his counterattack to Fuller. But during the preparation of the article the expected public interest did not materialize and Condon, according to Science editor Daniel S. Greenberg, decided it was "inappropriate for Science to touch the matter, withdrew his offer of cooperation, and proceeded to enunciate high-sounding principles in

support of his new-found belief that Science should not touch the subject until after publication of his report." When Greenberg reminded Condon that he had wanted the article and had offered complete cooperation, "Condon flatly refused to discuss the matter further."<sup>23</sup> Science printed the piece anyway. One of Condon's friends at the University of Colorado's Joint Institute for Laboratory Astrophysics criticized the magazine for writing about the controversy: because the public did not understand the workings of scientists, it tended to base its judgments on commentators' reactions to scientific controversies; the "tragedy" of the article was that "Science apparently fails to perceive that public acceptance of the rationality of science is at stake."<sup>24</sup> Condon's colleague may have overstated his case. In spite of the debate that the Fuller article created, the majority of people interested in the UFO controversy seemed to agree with the Denver Post which said that, although it would have liked Condon to answer Fuller's charges, "everyone [should] wait for the project report before passing judgment."<sup>25</sup>

Fuller's article even prompted reaction in Congress. Indiana Representative J. Edward Roush delivered a speech on the House floor saying the article raised "grave doubts as to the scientific profundity and objectivity of the project . . . ."<sup>26</sup> In an interview with the Denver Post, Roush cited the Low Memorandum as evidence of the Air Force's influence in the project from the start.<sup>27</sup> Roush, who had a prior interest in UFOs, recommended a new congressional investigation, took steps immediately to initiate such an investigation, and scheduled it for July 29, 1968. Under the auspices of the House Science and Astronautics Committee, this hearing was more encompassing and ambitious than the one in 1966.

Conceived of as a symposium, the participants were Hynek, McDonald, astronomer Carl Sagan, sociologist Robert L. Hall, engineer James A. Harder, and astronautics engineer Robert M. Baker. Menzel submitted a written statement, saying he was "amazed . . . that you [Roush] could plan so unbalanced a symposium, weighted by persons known to favor Government support of a continuing expensive and pointless investigation of UFOs without inviting me, the leading exponent of opposing views and author of two major books on the subject."<sup>28</sup> Psychologists Leo Sprinkle and Roger N. Shepard, nuclear physicists Stanton Friedman and Garry C. Henderson, and exobiologist Frank B. Salisbury also submitted prepared statements. The Science and Astronautics Committee set up symposium ground rules prohibiting any criticism of the Condon project or the Air Force because, the committee said, the House Armed Services Committee was the appropriate place to criticize the Air Force or an Air Force sponsored project.<sup>29</sup>

Hynek was first to speak. He recounted his involvement in the UFO controversy and his change of mind over the years; at first he believed that the subject was "rank nonsense, the product of silly seasons, and a peculiarly American craze that would run its course as all popular crazes do"; but, as he examined more of the data over the years, he realized that there might indeed be "scientific paydirt" in the phenomenon. He had not alerted the scientific community to the seriousness of the problem before, he said, because scientists had to be sure of their facts; he did not want to cry "wolf" unless he was reasonably sure there was a wolf; now he was sure. Hynek offered two reasons for why scientists had not shown interest in UFOs previously. First, he said, was the lack of hard core data and a method for obtaining this data; the Air Force failed to uncover such data

because it was concerned only with determining whether UFOs were a threat to national security. The second reason, Hynek explained, was the contactees and sensational treatment of UFOs in pulp magazines. Hynek noted that the subject was so illegitimate for scientists that "there appears to be a scientific taboo on even the passive tabulation of UFO reports"; it would be "foolhardy" for a scientist to present a paper on UFOs to the American Physical Society or to the American Astronomical Society--"the paper would be laughed down."<sup>30</sup> In contrast, Hynek noted, the recent 1966-67 wave of sightings increased scientific interest and all for the good. Scientists' misconceptions about the nature of UFO information have been "so powerful and all-encompassing," he said, "that an amazing lethargy and apathy to investigation has prevailed. This apathy is unbecoming to the ideals of science and undermines public confidence." The new scientific interest, Hynek explained, gave the impression that "we should either fish or cut bait." He wanted to fish and recommended establishing a "UFO Scientific Board of Inquiry properly funded, for the specific purpose of an investigation in depth of the UFO phenomenon." He also recommended using the United Nations for a free interchange of international sighting reports and data. Due to continued reports of close encounters with "unexplainable craft" from sane, reputable people, Hynek said, he had to believe that either the reports were scientifically valuable or world society contained people "who are articulate, sane, and reputable in all matters save UFO reports." Either way, the phenomenon deserved study.<sup>31</sup>

The second speaker was McDonald. His speech before the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1967, his disclosure of the CIA's

influence in the early years of the UFO controversy, and his UFO research had established him as the leading scientist who championed the extraterrestrial hypothesis. McDonald had done more investigative research into UFOs than any other scientist except for Hynek. McDonald was a dynamic person who never equivocated on his views. When he first met Hynek in 1967, he walked into the office, pounded on the desk, and asked, "How could you sit on this information for so many years without alerting the scientific community?" Hynek later said this incident was "like a breath of fresh air," for here at last was a reputable scientist who was not afraid to say UFOs deserved scientific study.<sup>32</sup> For years afterward, McDonald maintained that Hynek long ago could have changed the direction of scientific thought about UFOs if he had not been so timid.

McDonald began his testimony by saying that, even though scientists had been lax to investigate UFOs because of the anecdotal evidence involved, the UFO matter was of "extraordinary scientific importance." He outlined his own change in attitude about UFOs: he, too, had placed little credence in UFO reports at first, but his research during the past few years convinced him that the extraterrestrial hypothesis was capable of explaining the majority of unexplained UFO reports whereas other hypotheses were not.<sup>33</sup> For example, he had researched independently the 1952 Washington, D.C., sightings and found that the temperature inversion theory was "untenable." UFOs were "entirely real," he said, and we do not know what they are because we have laughed them out of court."<sup>34</sup> He supported Hynek's suggestion for an ongoing UFO study on a global scale and urged further House hearings to enable scientists to debate the issue. He also thought that perhaps NASA or the National Science Foundation

should conduct a UFO investigation with a "broader basis" than the present Condon study.<sup>35</sup>

Former O'Brien committee member and Cornell professor of astronomy Dr. Carl Sagan, testified third. Taking a sceptical attitude toward UFOs being extraterrestrial, he confined his remarks to the possibilities of extraterrestrial life and the problems of space travel. He thought that extraterrestrial life probably existed elsewhere in the universe, although intelligent life was most unlikely in our solar system; yet, space travel, while encountering the difficulties of time over great distances, Sagan said, was not physically impossible.<sup>36</sup>

The fourth person to speak was Dr. Robert L. Hall, chairman of the Sociology Department at the University of Illinois. He examined the theory that "hysterical contagion" caused UFO reports and found that it was "highly improbable" for "hard-core" cases and "the weight of evidence is strongly against it." Hall indicated that "there is strong evidence that there is some physical phenomena underlying a portion of the reports. To alleviate panic over UFOs, Hall said, the government should circulate freely all available information about the phenomenon and scientists should study carefully 100 to 200 cases per year for "recurring patterns, with emphasis on the way they react to their environment, the way they react to light sources, the way they react to presence of humans and so on." Hall also wanted to establish a system to pick the "strong" UFO reports from others and "enthusiastically agreed with Hynek's suggestion of a Board of Inquiry."<sup>37</sup>

Dr. James A. Harder, associate professor of civil engineering at the University of California, did not mince words: "On the basis of the

data and ordinary rules of evidence, as would be applied in civil or criminal courts, the physical reality of UFO's has been proved beyond a reasonable doubt." He thought that the objects were "interplanetary" and their propulsion was based on "an application of gravitational fields that we do not understand." As did the previous witness, Harder recommended a continued scientific investigation of UFOs.<sup>38</sup>

The last witness was Dr. Robert M. Baker, senior scientist with the Computer Sciences Corporation in southern California, editor of the Journal of Astronomical Sciences, and a former UCLA professor of astronomy and engineering. Baker had analyzed, among others, the Mariana and Newhouse films and concluded that the Mariana film exhibited "anomalous" objects and the Newhouse film, "most probably anomalous objects." Addressing himself to why American sky photography projects, radar surveillance systems, telescopes, and military detection equipment had not provided many photographs of unidentified flying objects, he explained that the majority of astronomical equipment was specialized and "would probably not detect the anomalous luminous phenomena reported by the casual observer." Only one American surveillance system had a "slight opportunity" to detect UFOs above the earth's atmosphere, Baker said, but the system was classified and he could not discuss it in detail. He had visited Air Defense Command headquarters and confirmed that, since the equipment had been operative, "there have been a number of anomalous alarms. Alarms that, as of this date, have not been explained on the basis of natural phenomena interference, equipment malfunction or inadequacy, or manmade space objects." Baker concluded: "We have not now, nor have we been in the past, able to achieve a complete--or even partially

complete--surveillance of space in the vicinity of the earth, comprehensive enough to betray the presence of or provide quantitative information on anomalous phenomena." He recommended instituting a long-term, properly funded, interdisciplinary, mobile scientific task force to study the surveillance problem and develop UFO sensing and tracking equipment. Baker also suggested a system of "listening posts" for possible extraterrestrial communication and studies to forecast technological and behavioral patterns of advanced extraterrestrial life.<sup>39</sup>

Finally, a House committee staff member placed into the record the papers that Menzel, Stanton Friedman, Frank Salisbury, Leo Sprinkle, Garry Henderson and Richard Shepard had prepared. Menzel's paper included his familiar theories that UFOs were mirages, reflections, temperature inversions, and the like.<sup>40</sup> In his paper, Friedman criticized the positions of Menzel, Klass, and Markowitz and concluded that "the earth is being visited by intelligently controlled vehicles whose origin is extraterrestrial."<sup>41</sup> Dr. Frank Salisbury's paper discussed the issue of non-contact and the danger of attributing human motivation to nonhuman intelligence: "To inductively extrapolate from our own current sociological approaches to those of other intelligent entities would be to commit the logical sin of extrapolation in a most flagrant manner."<sup>42</sup> In their papers, Dr. Leo Sprinkle (psychologist at the University of Wyoming), Dr. Garry C. Henderson (senior research scientist for General Dynamics), and Dr. Richard N. Shepard (psychology professor at Stanford) took issue with Menzel's theories and criticized him for not giving enough credit to human observations, perceptions, and witnesses' ability to reconstruct accurately what they saw.<sup>43</sup>

Thus ended the second congressional hearing on UFOs. Although the House Science and Astronautics Committee prohibited all participants from criticizing the Colorado project openly, the criticism was apparent nonetheless. Each witness recommended an ongoing systematic investigation of UFOs; none suggested or implied that the Condon project would settle the debate over UFOs or would add significantly to knowledge about the subject. The hearing-symposium made the strongest case to date for continued study of UFOs. It also represented growing academic interest in the subject: a few years before the 1968 hearing Hynek was the only American scientist capable of discussing the UFO phenomenon knowledgeably and from a research basis; but at the time of the hearing at least twenty specialists in the physical and social sciences (apart from the Condon committee) were taking an active interest in the subject. The 1965-67 sighting wave had helped create this new scholarly interest and the Condon committee's work helped "legitimatize" the subject. In 1968 many academicians interested in UFOs joined APRO which, with the help of Assistant Director Richard Greenwell, had launched an active recruitment program to gain these consultants for its work.<sup>44</sup>

The July 1968 House hearings came at the end of a peak period of sightings and of public interest in and press coverage of the phenomenon; membership in the two national organizations also dropped, as all interested groups waited for the Condon committee's final report due in the fall of 1968.<sup>45</sup> After the firing of Saunders and Levine in February 1968, press coverage of the Condon committee was virtually nonexistent; Condon stopped making public speeches and very few people knew what was happening in the project. The only event to mar the quietude of this period was the

publication of Saunders' book, UFOs? Yes!, a blow-by-blow account of the early problems in the Colorado project. Saunders, sure that the Condon committee's final report would not recommend further systematic study, attempted in his book to prepare the public for this and to raise the issue of the committee's "objectivity."

In November 1968, before Condon released the final report publicly, he turned it over to the National Academy of Sciences for review and approval. The Academy's review panel consisted of eleven scientists who approved the report's scope, methodology, and concurred with all its conclusions and recommendations. The panel found the study to be a "credible effort to apply objectively the relevant techniques of science to the solution of the UFO problem"; it agreed that systematically studying UFO reports was not a "promising way to expand understanding of the phenomena" and concluded that "the least likely explanation of UFOs is the hypothesis of extraterrestrial visitations by intelligent beings."<sup>46</sup> Frederick Sietz, president of the National Academy of Sciences, wrote to Assistant Secretary of the Air Force Alexander Flax in January 1969 to say he hoped the Academy's review would "be helpful to you and other responsible officials in determining the nature and scope of any continuing research effort in this area." Flax added that the National Academy of Sciences had made its report for the "sole purpose" of helping the Air Force make this decision.<sup>47</sup>

The Condon committee final report, 1485 pages in hard cover and 965 pages in paperback, contained a collection of analyses from various individuals who were either with the project or were consultants. It had six sections and extensive appendices. The New York Times science editor,

Walter Sullivan, wrote the preface to the paperback edition; the preface basically was an answer to Saunders' book and a hint of what was to come in the body of the text. Sullivan called proponents of the extraterrestrial hypothesis "UFO enthusiasts" or "UFO believers." People who "believed" in the extraterrestrial theory did so, said Sullivan, because of "a hope that some sort of superior beings are watching over our world prepared to intervene if things get too bad"; although these "UFO enthusiasts" tried to discredit the report before it came out, the National Academy of Sciences gave it "straight As." Turning then to the project's critics and internal disputes, Sullivan claimed that Keyhoe, "as author of Flying Saucers Are Real, has a vested interest in the confirmation of his theories" and therefore tried to discredit the project. Sullivan explained that Condon's negative statements about UFOs and his apparent interest in contactee stories were the products of a "garrulous soul who loves to spin a yarn"; Condon found it hard to resist recounting some of the "sillier episodes" in UFO research. The project's biggest problem, according to Sullivan, was the release of the Low Memorandum. Condon did not agree with its contents, Sullivan explained, and had not seen it before the release; the Look article was a product of giving the memorandum to "disgruntled UFO believers."<sup>48</sup>

Comprising the main section of the report were ninety-one case analyses. Most were neither the cases that Low had compiled nor those NICAP had donated. Of the ninety-one cases, the project staff identified sixty-one as misperceptions, hoaxes, and the like. The remaining thirty were either "possible," "probable," "inconclusive," or "unidentified." Because of the tentative nature of these unsolved cases, the committee

listed all of them as "unexplained." This finding was significant in view of the project's working definition of a UFO: "The stimulus for a report made by one or more individuals of something seen in the sky (or an object thought to be capable of flight but seen when landed on the earth) which the observer could not identify as having an ordinary natural origin" and which seemed sufficiently puzzling to make a report to the authorities.<sup>49</sup> By using this definition, the project concerned itself not with extensive evaluation of UFO reports that had defied previous analysis but with any UFO report prior to any analysis; this method of reviewing any report and not just those that others could not identify greatly increased the project's chances of identifying the cases it studied. Still, the staff could not identify about one-third of the cases.

The final report divided the cases into five categories: astronaut sightings, optical and radar sightings, old cases, current cases, and photographic evidence. In the astronaut sighting section, author Franklin Roach said three observations from astronauts McDivitt and Borman were "a challenge to the analyst" and "puzzling." Of the ten cases Roach examined that predated the report, he listed only one as "identified"; two were "possible," one "probable," one "inconclusive," one "part unidentified and part astronomical," and four "unidentified."<sup>50</sup>

Gordon Thayer wrote the section on optical and radar sightings, dividing them into two groups: those with unidentified visual phenomena but identified radar phenomena, and those with both unidentified visual and radar phenomena. An example of the latter was the Lakenheath, England, case in August 1965, and Thayer concluded that "this is the most puzzling and unusual case in the radar-visual files. The apparently rational,

intelligent behavior of the UFO suggests a mechanical device of unknown origin as the most probable explanation of this sighting."<sup>51</sup> Later in the report, the staff discussed this case again and concluded that "the probability that at least one genuine UFO was involved appeared to be fairly high."<sup>52</sup> In another case Thayer said the "sighting defies explanation by conventional means." Describing a radar-visual report in Colorado Springs, Colorado, Thayer concluded: "This must remain as one of the most puzzling radar cases on record, and no conclusion is possible at this time."<sup>53</sup>

In the category of current, nonphotographic cases, the staff analyzed thirty-four reports, but some were multiple sightings and brought the total to fifty-one reports; thirteen of the sightings in these reports remained "unidentified."<sup>54</sup> Of the fourteen photographic cases (one of which occurred on two days and made a total of fifteen photos), photoanalyst William K. Hartmann listed three as positively identified, eleven as either possible, probable, or inconclusive, and one as unidentified.<sup>55</sup> The latter involved two photographs that a farmer in McMinneville, Oregon, took in 1950; the project staff analyzed the original negatives and interviewed the farmer. Hartmann concluded: "This is one of the few UFO reports in which all factors investigated, geometric, psychological, and physical [sic] appear to be consistent with the assertion that an extraordinary flying object, silvery, metallic, disk-shaped, tens of meters in diameter, and evidently artificial, flew within sight of two witnesses."<sup>56</sup> The number of reports the committee could not identify--thirty of the ninety-one analyzed--strongly suggested that some cases involved "genuine" UFOs. But the final report buried this implication: it

devoted most space to the identified objects.

Condon ignored these findings in his recommendations, which he placed at the beginning of the lengthy report. Condon's recommendations were more reflective of the speeches he gave during the course of the project than of the evidence in the final report. His general conclusion was "that nothing has come from the study of UFOs in the past 21 years that has added to scientific knowledge. Careful consideration of the record as it is available to us leads us to conclude that further extensive study of UFOs probably cannot be justified in the expectation that science will be advanced thereby." Addressing himself to previous lack of scientific interest in the UFO phenomenon, Condon said that scientists had "ample opportunity" to study the phenomenon and "have individually decided that UFO phenomena do not offer a fruitful field in which to look for major scientific discoveries."<sup>57</sup> In light of this fact, Condon said, the federal government should not study UFO reports "in the expectation that they are going to contribute to the advance of science" and the Air Force's conclusions that UFOs are not a threat to national security was valid. The Department of Defense, Condon suggested, should give UFOs attention "only so much as it deems necessary from a defense point of view" and could do this "within the framework established for intelligence and surveillance operations without the continuance of a special unit such as Project Blue Book." Condon found that--contrary to popular opinion--the subject of UFOs had not been "shrouded in official secrecy . . . . What had been miscalled secrecy has been no more than an intelligent policy of delay in releasing data so that the public does not become confused by premature publication of incomplete studies of reports."<sup>58</sup>

Condon argued that the staff had found "no direct evidence whatever of a convincing nature . . . for the claim that any UFOs represent spacecraft visiting Earth from another civilization." Although scientists said that intelligent life elsewhere was "essentially certain," Condon argued, the great distances and time involved in interplanetary travel precluded the "possibility of contact between the communities on planets associated with different stars." He concluded: "There is no relation between ILE [intelligent life elsewhere] at [sic] other solar systems and the UFO phenomenon as observed on Earth." To illustrate that it was a "fantasy" to believe in the extraterrestrial hypothesis, Condon cited, among others, contactee Truman Bethurum's claim that the planet "Clarion" was located behind the sun and thus always out of earth's view. Condon spent two pages proving that Clarion could not possibly exist and, therefore, that people who believed in the extraterrestrial hypothesis were misguided.<sup>59</sup> He also offered his version of the project's conflict with NICAP. Although NICAP maintained friendly relations with the project at the beginning, Condon explained, "during this period NICAP made several efforts to influence the course of our study. When it became clear that these would fail, NICAP attacked the Colorado project as 'biased' and therefore without merit."<sup>60</sup>

Condon's final remarks in the opening section concerned the problem of "miseducation" in public schools. This arose "from the fact that many children are being allowed, if not actively encouraged, to devote their science study time to the reading of UFO books and magazine articles"; because of errors in the material, children were "educationally harmed" or retarded in the "development of a critical faculty with regard to

scientific evidence." To remedy this situation, Condon recommended that teachers "refrain from giving students credit" for work done on UFOs and instead "channel their interests in the direction of serious study of astronomy and meteorology, and in the direction of critical analysis of arguments for fantastic propositions that are being supported by appeals to fallacious reasoning or false data."<sup>61</sup>

Reactions to the Condon committee's final report followed expected lines. Keyhoe, McDonald, and Saunders held a new conference on January 11, 1969, a few days after the report appeared, and denounced it as a "waste of money." McDonald and Saunders charged that Condon was biased against the extraterrestrial intelligence hypothesis, that the committee had failed to investigate the "vast majority" of significant UFO reports, and that Condon's conclusions did not represent the findings in the text. Furthermore, McDonald said that the National Academy of Sciences' review panel was "not adequately prepared to assess" the report.<sup>62</sup> Keyhoe claimed the Condon committee had examined only about one percent of the "reliable, unexplained" UFO sighting reports that NICAP had supplied.<sup>63</sup>

Keyhoe elaborated on his objections in a special January issue of NICAP's UFO Investigator. Prefacing his remarks with the statement that he and several leading scientists were preparing an evaluation of the report, Keyhoe said one concern was that Condon personally had not made field investigations (Condon had made a few trips). He accused Condon of trying to discredit some witnesses by calling them "'inexpert, inept, or unduly excited'" and of concentrating on "kook cases." He pointed out the sections of the report which seemed to reaffirm that UFOs were a unique phenomenon and appealed to NICAP members for money to carry on a "full-

scale campaign to bring the UFO subject out in the open in order to offset the Condon report." Keyhoe's main criticism was about the inadequacy of the investigation: he accused Condon of ignoring numerous "top cases" involving credible witnesses, pilots, policemen, and the like, cases which fit the project's requirements for witness reliability. Condon used only fifty cases from the 1947 to 1967 period, Keyhoe charged, whereas NICAP had 10,000 to 15,000 such cases in its files and the fifty the project used did not represent the main body of solid UFO reports.<sup>64</sup> It was true that the project did not evaluate the total number of UFO reports that the two national organizations and the Air Force received; instead, the staff concentrated on individual reports in a vacuum and, therefore, could not deal with sighting patterns or recurring sighting characteristics. Thus, the staff analyzed reports without regard to the context of previous reports. In the absence of physical evidence of UFOs, it was virtually impossible to conclude they existed by looking at only a handful of cases. In the next issue of the UFO Investigator Keyhoe emphatically denied Condon's charge that NICAP had withdrawn support after failing to influence the project's direction. NICAP did indeed try to influence the project, Keyhoe said, but only "in the direction of objectivity, thoroughness, and concentration on the really significant reports." NICAP made every effort to cooperate with Condon and withdrew its support only "when it became evident that the project situation was beyond repair and foredoomed to be biased and superficial."<sup>65</sup>

APRO's reaction to the final report was as negative as NICAP's. Coral Lorenzen said that, just as Condon dismissed many sighting reports because of internal inconsistencies, "we find that the report as a whole

fails to pass the same test and should therefore be dismissed and/or discredited." The Lorenzens criticized the report for its "looseness and shallowness," citing as examples Condon's unsubstantiated conclusions that there was no evidence of Air Force secrecy and that school children should not be allowed to study the UFO phenomenon. Claiming that the project did not investigate enough cases adequately, the Lorenzens said the report showed a "tendency to choose and emphasize cases which have no particular significance." They attacked the report's methodology by offering case analyses that directly contradicted those in the report.<sup>66</sup>

Other UFO groups and people connected with them also opposed the report, as was expected. Nuclear physicist Stanton Friedman and electronics engineer Joseph Jenkins, members of a Pittsburgh UFO research group loosely affiliated with NICAP, criticized Condon for much the same things as Keyhoe and others had. Leonard Stringfield, an old-line UFO proponent, claimed that Condon's thinking was "Neanderthal" and "retrogressive while our Apollo flights confirm that interplanetary flights are at our doorstep."<sup>67</sup> Dr. Earl J. Neff of the Cleveland Ufology Project said Condon was biased and the Air Force had for years "been on the hot seat." The Air Force would not admit UFOs were extraterrestrial "because there's no known defense against UFO's."<sup>68</sup>

Dr. James McDonald, speaking before the DuPont Chapter of the Scientific Research Society of America (in Wilmington, Delaware), attacked the Condon committee on nine points. He criticized it for analyzing only "a tiny fraction of the significant and scientifically puzzling UFO reports" and for not discussing certain significant cases it did investigate, such as the 1957 Levelland (Texas) sightings. Many of the reports were

trivial and insignificant, McDonald said, and the committee should have ignored them. McDonald charged that scientifically weak and specious argumentation abounded in the case analyses. While Condon had said that scientists previously interested in the UFO phenomenon were biased, "the Report exhibits degrees of bias in the opposite direction that deserve the sharpest of criticism." As an example of bias, McDonald discussed the "disturbingly incomplete presentation of relevant evidence" that, in some cases, was so severe as to be "little short of misrepresentation of case information." In addition, the quantity of "irrelevant padding" was so great, he said, that scientists would find studying the report tedious. Moreover, Condon "casually ignored" in his conclusions the significant number of cases that remained unidentified. McDonald summed up his objections by charging that the report "dismally" failed to support Condon's negative recommendations and that the National Academy of Sciences' endorsement would eventually "prove to be a painful embarrassment to the Academy." He would devote all possible personal effort to air objectively the report's inadequacies, McDonald promised, because "no further general progress towards scientific clarification of the UFO problem will come" until the Condon report's negative influence is neutralized.<sup>69</sup>

Hynek's critique was perhaps the most cogent. Writing in the April 1969 issue of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, he praised Condon for his previous contributions to physics but said his effort in the report was analogous to "that of a Mozart producing an uninspired pot-boiler, unworthy of his talents." Hynek pointed out that the number of unexplained sightings in the report was higher than in the Air Force files and that the Air Force's concern over unidentifieds was what "led

Condon to the investigation in the first place." He outlined some of the cases that were "a challenge to human curiosity" and deserved further attention. Hynek thought Condon had "grossly underestimated the scope and nature of the problem he was undertaking," as evidenced in his definition of UFOs. The definition, Hynek said, was so broad that "too much was admitted for possible study when only limited time and funds were available." Hynek proposed an alternate definition that limited the purpose: "A UFO is a report . . . the contents of which are puzzling not only to the observer but to others who have the technical training the observer may lack." On the basis of his many years of experience, Hynek said, he would have deleted about two-thirds of the report's cases as scientifically profitless; investigating them was a "waste of time."<sup>70</sup>

Warming to his task, Hynek zeroed in on the report's underlying assumption. The project staff and the public, Hynek claimed, had confused the UFO problem with the extraterrestrial hypothesis. The question was not whether the extraterrestrial hypothesis was valid but whether a legitimate UFO phenomenon existed regardless of theories about its origin. If scientists in the nineteenth century had attempted to explain the aurora, "it would not have been responsible to state that the polar phenomenon gave no evidence of some metaterrestrial intelligence"; rather, the issue would have been "whether the aurora could have been explained in terms of nineteenth century physics." Similarly, "it may be that UFO phenomena are just as inexplicable in terms of twentieth-century physics." Condon's conclusion that a phenomenon that thousands of people over a long period of time had reported was still unworthy of further scientific attention, Hynek said, did not serve science.<sup>71</sup>

Hynek hit hard at the project's selection of scientists: taking "an untried, and therefore, presumably unbiased group to take a fresh look at the UFO problem . . . was akin to asking a group of culinary novices to take a fresh look at cooking and then open a restaurant. Without seasoned advice, there would be many burned pots, many burned fingers, many dissatisfied customers." Concluding his critique, Hynek found "a serious operational and epistemological flaw" in the report's methods. "For any given reported UFO case, if taken by itself and without respect and regard to correlations with other truly puzzling reports in this and other countries," Hynek explained, "a possible natural, even though far-fetched, explanation can always be adduced." The Condon committee found well-known causes for most UFOs because it operated solely on the hypothesis that these were the causes; it was impossible for the Condon committee "to have regarded any report as arising from anything other than natural causes, a hoax, or hallucination." As an example that the committee was prone to finding only well-known causes, Hynek quoted a passage from the report: "'This unusual sighting should therefore be assigned to the category of some almost certainly natural phenomenon which is so rare that it apparently has never been reported before or since.'" The final verdict on the Condon committee, Hynek said, "will be handed down by the UFO phenomenon itself. Past experience suggests that it cannot be readily waved away."<sup>72</sup>

Except for McDonald and Hynek, most other scientists did not react extensively to the Condon committee's report. Of those who did speak out, their reactions were divided. Dr. Robert M. L. Baker, who had testified at the 1968 House hearing, criticized the report in Scientific Research.

He said it did contain evidence that scientists should continue to study the UFO phenomenon although the "provocative" and unexplained UFO sightings were hidden in the text among extensive discussions of explained cases and often superfluous technical background material. The report mixed the unexplained and explained UFO cases "in what seems to be an almost contrived manner--and this tactic confuses or diverts all but the most dedicated reader." According to Baker, Condon should have "highlighted" the unexplained cases and juxtaposed them to the explained cases for comparison purposes. Baker thought the Condon committee should have determine if there was a "reasonably high probability that some new phenomena are at work in the unexplained UFO observations" and if there was a consistent pattern in these sightings. Then the committee should have formulated hypotheses to account for them.<sup>73</sup>

Frederick J. Hooven, who was a consultant to the committee and analyzed a case in which a low-flying UFO reportedly affected an automobile, also took issue with the final report. He did not think that UFOs were extraterrestrial, but he held that the possibility of a visitor from space was reasonable enough to warrant continuing investigation of UFOs. Although man could not speculate about the state of science 50,000 years from now, Hooven explained, the idea that an extraterrestrial, technologically-based civilization could be at least this far ahead of our own technological capabilities was conceivable; science was in its infancy and what we knew of physics was only a tiny fraction of what we would understand in the future. On this basis, Hooven criticized Condon for complaining, in the final report, that science fiction writers had set aside the laws of physics to account for their stories. "This is

exactly why the writers of fiction," Hoover said, "have so much better records at predicting the future than scientists have. They have seized on a much better principle for the long term than the laws of physics, and that is the purposes of mankind."<sup>74</sup>

On the other hand, some scientists supported the Condon committee's report. Dr. Donald E. Ehlers, president of the Boothe Memorial Astronomical Society, wrote in a letter to the New York Times that the committee was courageous because it "discounted a growing religion." But as a taxpayer Ehlers was annoyed: the government spent "five hundred kilobucks" to investigate a phenomenon and came to the same conclusion which, "since the beginning of this hysterical witchhunt, has been that of all professional scientists worthy of the title."<sup>75</sup> Dr. Hudson Hoagland, president emeritus of the Worcester Foundation for Experimental Biology and on the Board of Directors of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, claimed that the current concern with flying saucers resembled the old obsession with ghosts and seances. Even after people exposed seances as frauds, Hoagland said, the "devout band of followers never relinquished their belief in them. For Hoagland the Condon study added "massive additional weight to the already overwhelming improbability of visits by UFOs guided by intelligent beings." But, because science could not prove a negative, some UFOs would remain unexplained due to insufficient information; yet these unexplained cases did not justify continuing scientific investigation.<sup>76</sup>

Newspaper reactions were divided as well. Most applauded the conclusions and recommendations of the Condon committee, saying that the report was "reasonable," "thorough," "objective," and "sound" and that

the "eminent scientists" who served on the committee comprised an "impressive roster of experts." The New York Times ran full-page articles about the report and excerpts from it and gave it front-page coverage when it came out.<sup>77</sup> Condon and his staff, the Times said, had made "a careful and extensive investigation" of the phenomenon; but in spite of this, those "believers" who were "committed" to the extraterrestrial hypothesis probably would not be persuaded. Nevertheless, the study would find "wide acceptance" from all except a few "true believers," the Times predicted, and the rest of society could now worry about "more serious matters."<sup>78</sup> New York Times science editor Walter Sullivan, who wrote the preface to the paperback edition of the report, suggested that the small number of unexplained cases could be identified if the committee had sufficient information.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, the Wall Street Journal agreed that Condon's suggestion that further UFO study would not serve science was a "sound conclusion" and "common sense."<sup>80</sup>

The newspapers that praised the Condon committee's conclusions and recommendations almost always accompanied their remarks with the observation that "true believers," regardless of how convincing the report was, would not change their views. Frequently newspapers compared "true believers" with members of the British Flat Earth Society who, despite photographs and astronauts' eye-witness accounts, refused to believe the earth was round. One editorial said NICAP was akin to the "World is Flat Society" and accused it of trying to coerce one project investigator into making his findings "less positive."<sup>81</sup> Moreover, many newspapers--in a turnabout of general press coverage in 1965 and 1966--resorted to ridiculing UFO proponents as "UFO enthusiasts," "diehard wishful thinkers,"

"die-hard flying saucer sighters," "nuts," "fanatics," and "dedicated disciples of the 'little green men from Mars' school." Syndicated science writer William Hines accused Keyhoe of being interested in UFOs for the money he received from "the sale of sensational paperbacks, hooh-hah magazine articles and the donations of excitable people."<sup>82</sup>

Not all newspapers and journalists supported the Condon report. Lucian Warren, writing in the Buffalo (New York) Evening News, called the report a "total bust" in that it did not explain adequately the sightings in the Buffalo area.<sup>83</sup> The Knoxville (Tennessee) Journal expressed reservations because the report contained some unexplained photographs and sighting interpretations that did not seem consistent with the facts.<sup>84</sup> Chattanooga, Tennessee, columnist Sally Latham called the report a "\$500,000 woolly eyeshade."<sup>85</sup> Journalist Tom Tiede opposed the Condon report and defended NICAP: once again "America is laughing at Don Keyhoe," he said, but in the final analysis Keyhoe may have the last laugh.<sup>86</sup> Mike Culbert, columnist for the Berkeley (California) Daily Gazette, singularly attacked Condon for being a subversive (because of his past battles with the House Committee on Unamerican Activities) and intimated that Condon was following Moscow's "new 'line'" in trying to discredit the existence of UFOs.<sup>87</sup> This was a unique twist in the reactions.

Generally, magazine articles on the Condon committee's final report followed the same patterns as the newspaper reports. Magazines supporting the report thought it would not end the controversy. Philip Boffey, in Science, called the report the "most thorough and sophisticated investigation of the nebulous UFO phenomenon ever conducted" but doubted whether "flying saucer fans" or "UFO enthusiasts" would be

satisfied: "scientific methods are not always able to resolve problems in fields where emotions run high and data are scarce."<sup>88</sup> Popular Science writer Alden Armagnac thought the "believers" would not be quieted although the "chances of ever finding a real saucer look a whole lot more remote, after you read the Condon report, than before."<sup>89</sup> U.S. News and World Report and Newsweek also felt that the controversy would continue. Newsweek observed that saucer believers would continue to believe just as alchemy long resisted chemistry's discoveries and astrology survived in spite of modern psychology.<sup>90</sup> Similarly, the Nation said that, although we lived in an age of "ever-increasing rationality," science and the scientific method still inspired "stout resistance, especially when the subject is one of ancient myth and emotional connotation." The Nation theorized that we "yearn for neighbors among the stars" to help our "loneliness"; for example, the article pointed out, "hardly any of these true believers have seen, or even thought they saw, anything" but insisted on believing witnesses who "on investigation almost invariably turn out to be unreliable or to have a naturalistic explanation." The Nation agreed with Condon's recommendation to keep school children from reading about UFOs and getting a warped view of science; this was a "public service of no small importance."<sup>91</sup> Time, in "Saucers End," explained that the Condon report had destroyed saucer buffs' favorite theories with "rational, simple explanations."<sup>92</sup>

A few politicians also were annoyed enough to react to the Condon report. Congressman William F. Ryan (New York) attacked it on the House floor: the study did not explain conclusively the UFO phenomenon and its conclusions were not justified; accepting the conclusions might delay

solving the UFO puzzle and make "a scientific breakthrough in an understanding of the problem" more difficult. Noting that, in its July 1968 hearing, the House Committee on Science and Astronautics had forbidden discussion of the Condon committee because it fell within the jurisdiction of the House Armed Services Committee, Ryan said that Condon's conclusions were scientific judgments and therefore fell within the purview of the House Committee on Science and Astronautics. Therefore, Ryan said, it was that committee's "duty and responsibility" to hold hearings on the Condon report and its implications. Ryan also took issue with Condon's antischool UFO study recommendation: "presumably 20 years ago the authors of this report would have banned science fiction and the Buck Rogers comic strip." By trying to stop public discussion and governmental action on UFOs, Ryan charged, "the report undermines confidence in its own conclusions and recommendations. Public interest in UFOs cannot be wished away, and reported sightings will persist." Ryan recommended continued government involvement in UFOs, suggesting that NASA assume responsibility for the study.<sup>93</sup> California Congressman Jerry Pettis announced that he, too, would seek a congressional investigation of the Condon report in the next session.<sup>94</sup> Neither Ryan's recommendations nor Pettis' promise came to fruition.

During the public discussion over the report, Condon remained quiet. But he broke his silence in April 1969 in a speech before the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia. The topic was "UFOs I Have Loved and Lost." Condon defended his conclusion that continued scientific study of UFOs was unwarranted, despite those who said otherwise. To reinforce this point, he related how "flying saucer buffs who

have been making money from sensational writing and lecturing to gullible audiences, and collecting dues from the membership of their pseudo-science organizations" had "bitterly denounced" his conclusions. He told several humorous stories about contactees and also mentioned that some UFO proponents were "deeply sincere." He equated the study of UFOs with astrology, spiritualism, psychokinesis, and other pseudo-sciences and said it was practically criminal for teachers to teach these subjects to young people: "In my view publishers who publish or teachers who teach any of the pseudo-sciences as established truth should, on being found guilty, be publicly horsewhipped, and forever banned from further activity in these usually honorable professions."<sup>95</sup>

Throughout the debate over the Condon committee's final report, the Air Force continued its public relations effort--with less "sound and fury" than before because the Condon committee had taken some of the pressure off. Since 1966 the Air Force quietly had collected reports, submitted articles to magazines, and issued its usual press statements, fact sheets, and annual Project Blue Book Reports. The Blue Book Reports included statistical breakdowns of the number of reported sightings and the number of "solves," a standard resumé on how the Air Force investigated and analyzed UFO reports, an explanation of the most common misidentifications of known objects, short histories of the Air Force's UFO project, discussions of the improbability of UFOs coming from other planets, and a bibliography which usually contained only one book espousing the extraterrestrial hypothesis. Using its standard definition of a UFO--"any aerial object or phenomenon which the observer is unable to identify"<sup>96</sup>--the Air Force claimed in 1969 that it had identified all

but 701 of the 12,618 reports it had received since 1947. It reported a decline in reports: from the nearly 3,000 in the years 1965 through 1967 to 375 in 1968 and 146 in 1969--the lowest number since 1947. Only one report in 1969 was unidentified.<sup>97</sup> Because the Air Force put the "probable" and "possible" reports in with the "identified" reports, the statistics easily favored the "solves."

The Air Force purposefully kept a "low profile" during the Condon committee's study. Not wanting to be criticized for negatively influencing the committee, the Air Force was careful not to interfere with the committee's work and made no public statements about it. But the Air Force did not put aside work on its own UFO program. In 1966 and 1967, while the Condon committee was conducting its investigation, some people at the Foreign Technology Division (FTD) asked to strengthen Project Blue Book's scientific capabilities. This was the result of three factors: intense public interest in UFOs, the concomitant criticism of the Air Force, and the 1966 Gallup Poll finding that nearly half of the adult population believed "flying saucers" were "real" although not necessarily extraterrestrial. Noting the public interest, Colonel Raymond S. Sleeper, FTD's new commander, wanted to build a "new image for Project Blue Book" based on this "anchored public attitude." Sleeper thought that Project Blue Book should begin a "positive program aimed at establishing contact with extraterrestrial life."<sup>98</sup> But the Air Force Director of Information, General Garland, was not interested in new images in 1967 and wanted no part of a program to search for extraterrestrial life. Beside, said Garland, "we would really open the flood gates on UFO problems if the public thought that the Condon group was

about to involve in extensive research on extraterrestrial activities [sic]."<sup>99</sup> Thus ended Sleeper's plan to "energize" Project Blue Book.

Nonetheless, Sleeper was persistent. In September 1968 he wrote to Hynek asking for suggestions "towards defining those areas of scientific weakness" in Blue Book.<sup>100</sup> Hynek remarked that this request marked the first time--in the twenty years of his association with the Air Force--that anyone had asked for his advice on Blue Book's scientific methodology.<sup>101</sup> Hynek responded with a comprehensive critique of Blue Book's methods, attitudes, and conclusions. He started by attacking the Air Force in its most sensitive and potentially most responsive area: Blue Book, Hynek charged, had not fulfilled its twofold obligation, under AFR 80-17, to determine the potential danger of UFOs to the national security and to use the scientific and technical data garnered from the study of UFO reports. The Air Force had determined that UFOs were not dangerous, Hynek said, only because "so far nothing has happened to the United States from that source"; but this did not mean that UFOs were not hostile or that something could not happen in the future. Furthermore, Hynek stressed, Blue Book had been inept, inefficient, and unscientific: it had emphasized explanations at any cost and failed to investigate significant cases adequately, spending too much time on obvious and routine cases; the staff was not trained to handle the most rudimentary scientific analyses yet routinely used explanations based on sophisticated scientific knowledge. Hynek criticized the Air Force's policy of eliminating "possible, probable and insufficient data" categories from its year-end reports to make Blue Book seem efficient and most unidentifieds appear as misidentifications. Hynek complained that time and again his

suggestions for improving the quality of Blue Book had gone unheeded, that he even was not allowed free access to the UFO case files, and that he was not told about significant UFO reports. Blue Book was a "closed system," he charged, where Blue Book officers only talked to each other and made no attempts to establish working relationships with Air Force scientists or with Air Force laboratories. Finally, as in his later critique of the Condon report, Hynek accused the Air Force of treating UFO reports as completely separate occurrences and not attempting to discern patterns of reported UFO behavior which could be a valuable aid in solving the UFO mystery. By treating reports separately, Hynek argued, Project Blue Book personnel could always "solve" the case by explaining it as a misidentification of a natural phenomenon, an hallucination, or a hoax.<sup>102</sup>

Impassioned and critical as Hynek's letter was, it came too late for the Air Force to worry or do anything about, for the Condon report came out a few months later. Hynek's letter was the last major internal criticism of the Air Force. The Condon report recommended closing down Project Blue Book. On December 17, 1969, Secretary of the Air Force Robert C. Seamans, Jr., announced the termination of the Air Force's twenty-two year study of unidentified flying objects. An Air Force news release noted that Seamans, in a memorandum to Air Force Chief of Staff General John D. Ryan, said Blue Book's continuance "'cannot be justified either on the ground of national security or in the interest of science.'" Seamans based his recommendation on the Condon study, the National Academy of Sciences' approval of the study, "past UFO studies," and previous UFO investigating experience. The Air Force placed its UFO documents in the Air Force Archives at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama.<sup>103</sup>

Most UFO investigators and researchers were not unhappy about the announcement. McDonald called it "no great loss," since Blue Book had not been successful; he feared, though, that its closing might prompt people to believe that no real problem existed. APRO's James Lorenzen thought terminating Blue Book "eliminates a giant stumbling block which has until now hindered and crippled all attempts at objective inquiry" into the UFO problem.<sup>104</sup> Stuart Nixon, new assistant director at NICAP, said in a press conference that the Air Force's termination "opens the way for a fresh look at the UFO problem . . . free from military consideration"; he called for a federal or private agency to open new UFO investigations.<sup>105</sup> Ironically, a New York Times editorial said that nearly everyone in the country--except "saucer buffs"--would applaud the Air Force's decision; "no doubt true believers will continue their quest more convinced than ever" of a conspiracy. The paper was puzzled that the Air Force waited nearly a year after Condon had "punctured the U.F.O. bubble" to act.<sup>106</sup>

The closing down of Blue Book, in addition to the dearth of sightings since 1968 and the Condon report, definitely affected public enthusiasm for the subject. NICAP, claiming 12,000 members in 1967, steadily lost members through 1968 and 1969; by 1971 the membership decreased to 4,000.<sup>107</sup> APRO had the same problem, its membership declining from about 4,000 to 2,000 in 1971.<sup>108</sup> Newspaper and magazine publicity, with the exception of articles on the Condon committee and the closing of Blue Book, virtually ceased. Many of the popular UFO magazines stopped publication for lack of readership. The contactees, who had long since faded in popularity although still somewhat in evidence, were no longer a factor in flying saucer enthusiasm. Furthermore, younger

people were displacing some of the familiar figures. Donald Keyhoe retired as director of NICAP at the end of 1969 and Stuart Nixon replaced him; the financial problems that had plagued NICAP since its beginning became so serious that Nixon's major concern was keeping the organization "alive." Keyhoe remained on the Board of Directors and began to write his fifth book on UFOs. Hynek, out of a job with the Air Force, remained in his position at Northwestern University and also began work on a book about the UFO phenomenon and the Air Force's and Condon's investigation of it. In 1968 Richard Greenwell, a young British administrator, became assistant director of APRO and also tried to avert a financial crisis--the result of the Condon report and subsequent loss of membership. Interest on a popular level did not disappear completely, though. A new club, the Midwest UFO Network, appeared in 1969 and its membership rapidly climbed, although its numbers only amounted to several hundred by 1970.

Even though the established private UFO organizations were in serious trouble at the end of 1969, scientific interest in UFOs still was at a peak. The American Association for the Advancement of Science scheduled a symposium on UFOs for its December 1969 convention, with James McDonald as the featured speaker. The American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics UFO Subcommittee continued its UFO study with a report promised for 1970. Scientists, less fearful of ridicule because of the legitimacy the Condon committee had given the topic, became increasingly active in the field; through Richard Greenwell's aggressive recruiting of consultants for APRO, over twenty-five physical and social scientists joined the APRO consultant roster by late 1969.

By 1970 the UFO controversy was practically a forgotten episode in the press. NICAP and APRO's loss of membership had depleted their finances and the heads of these organizations began to redirect their efforts. They no longer cried for a "scientific investigation." Instead, Stuart Nixon of NICAP and the Lorenzens and Richard Greenwell of APRO started to computerize and microfilm all their sighting reports so that investigators would have easy access to the "raw data." The new theory among UFO investigators was that individual scholars would have to study selected aspects of the phenomenon and come to independent conclusions. The shift was away from asking the "outside" community to consider the origins of UFOs and toward encouraging the growing number of individual scientists interested in the subject to conduct their own "internal" investigations free from the encumbrances of the "scientific establishment." Reflecting this new attitude, APRO held two symposiums on the UFO phenomenon, one in Baltimore in January 1971 and the second in Tucson in November 1971. The Tucson symposium featured papers by thirteen APRO consultants in various scientific disciplines.<sup>109</sup>

The ridicule attached to the study of UFOs revived in 1970. Science magazine refused to publish astronomer William T. Powers' paper on UFOs, explaining to him that "at the present time the overwhelming majority of our readers are not interested in a further discussion" of the phenomenon. Science also refused to publish a critique of the Condon report by Rice University astronomer Douglass Price-Williams.<sup>110</sup> Yet the magazine did print an article by social worker Donald Warren espousing the theory that most people who reported UFOs suffered from "status inconsistency": UFO witnesses had a higher educational level than their

employment indicated.<sup>111</sup> But Science magazine's attitude did not necessarily reflect the attitudes of physical and social scientists in general. The American Institute of Astronautics and Aeronautics released its promised UFO subcommittee report in November 1970. The subcommittee found no basis for Condon's conclusion that nothing of scientific value would come from further study of UFOs. In fact, the subcommittee found it "difficult to ignore the small residue of well-documented but unexplainable cases which form the hard core of the UFO controversy." It recommended increased study with an emphasis on data collection and "high-quality scientific analysis" and expressed hope that scientists, engineers, and government agencies would consider "sound proposals in this field without bias or fear of ridicule and repercussion." Finally, the subcommittee announced it would publish examples of "hard-core" UFO cases so that AIAA members could form their own opinions.<sup>112</sup> In July and September 1971 the AIAA journal carried two important "UFO Encounter" cases.<sup>113</sup> Also in 1971 Industrial Research polled its readers about the UFO phenomenon. Of the 2,700 respondents, 54 percent thought UFOs "probably" or "definitely" existed, 8 percent claimed to have seen a UFO, 32 percent thought the objects were from "outer space," 32 percent thought they were conventional phenomena, and 35 percent was undecided about their origin.<sup>114</sup>

James McDonald's death in 1971 cut down a potentially dynamic force in UFO investigation and was a severe blow to exponents of the extraterrestrial hypothesis. But he seemed to have had an influence nevertheless. A growing core of scientists interested in the UFO mystery began to think along McDonald's lines. Many were younger men who had not

gone through the "wars" with the Air Force, the contactees, and the scientific community. They formed the nucleus of a new systematic approach to the UFO phenomenon in the early 1970s. Hynek, whom McDonald had criticized for not taking a strong enough stance on the lack of systematic study, completed his book, The UFO Experience: A Scientific Inquiry, which came out in 1972. In it, he criticized the Air Force's handling of UFO reports and the Condon committee's methods and conclusions, and he dispassionately described the UFO phenomenon and issues in UFO research. He set up new procedures whereby scientists could study the problem. With this unemotional and undogmatic approach, Hynek helped bring the subject back to respectability and even obtained a favorable review in the pages of Science.<sup>115</sup> In 1973 Carl Sagan, who had served on the O'Brien committee and testified at the 1968 House hearings, and Thornton Page, who had been on the 1953 Robertson Panel, completed their edition of the papers presented at the 1969 American Association for the Advancement of Science UFO symposium. This book was the first on the UFO phenomenon to be published by an academic press--Cornell University.<sup>116</sup>

As for the UFO witnesses--they continued to see strange things in the sky and to report them to the police or UFO organizations. Although sightings were down considerably in 1969 when the Condon report came out, they did not stop and there seemed to be another wave in the summer of 1972. The people who saw UFOs seemed impervious to the debates surrounding their claims; their sightings, which had prompted twenty-six years of heated battle, seemed in a sense above the debates--a thing-in-themselves. Unaffected by the ideas of Keyhoe, Hynek, and Menzel, and scarcely noticing what the debates entailed or what impact their sightings had,

people still witnessed and reported UFOs. The unidentified flying objects themselves kept the controversy alive.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>David Saunders and R. Roger Harkins, UFOs? Yes! (New York: Signet, 1968), pp. 67-74. I obtained much of the information on the internal methodology and disputes from the book.

<sup>2</sup>Edward U. Condon, project director, Scientific Study of Unidentified Flying Objects (New York: Bantam, 1969), p. 15. I will hereafter refer to this book as Condon Report. See also Saunders and Harkins, p. 50.

<sup>3</sup>Saunders and Harkins, pp. 67-69.

<sup>4</sup>Saunders and Harkins, p. 135. See also Mary Lou Armstrong's letter of resignation in J. Allen Hynek, The UFO Experience: A Scientific Inquiry (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1972), p. 245.

<sup>5</sup>Saunders and Harkins, pp. 115-117, 119.

<sup>6</sup>Letter from Edward U. Condon to Donald E. Keyhoe, 2 February 1967 (in the files of the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena, Washington, D.C., to which I will hereafter refer as NICAP).

<sup>7</sup>1967 Congress of Scientific Ufologists (New York: Privately printed, 1967), p. 14.

<sup>8</sup>Saunders and Harkins, pp. 78-80, 132-133.

<sup>9</sup>Saunders and Harkins, p. 141.

<sup>10</sup>Saunders and Harkins, pp. 81-108, 136-137.

<sup>11</sup>Memorandum from Robert J. Low to E. James Archer and Thurston E. Manning, "Some Thoughts on the UFO Project," 9 August 1966, typed copy (NICAP, and in the files of the Aerial Phenomena Research Organization, Tucson, Arizona, to which I will hereafter refer as APRO). Also contained in Saunders and Harkins, pp. 242-244.

<sup>12</sup>Saunders and Harkins, p. 130.

<sup>13</sup>Letter from James E. McDonald to Robert J. Low, 31 January 1968, contained in Saunders and Harkins, pp. 244-252.

<sup>14</sup>Saunders and Harkins, pp. 188-195. See also Rocky Mountain News (Denver), 10 February 1968, p. 31.

<sup>15</sup>Letter from Mary Lou Armstrong to Edward U. Condon, 24 February 1968, contained in Hynek, The UFO Experience, pp. 243-245. See also Denver Post, 29 February 1968, p. 61.

<sup>16</sup>Saunders and Harkins, passim, and p. 21.

<sup>17</sup>John Fuller, "Flying Saucer Fiasco," Look, 14 May 1968, p. 63.

<sup>18</sup>Denver Post, 30 April 1968, p. 15.

<sup>19</sup>Fuller, Look, 14 May 1968, p. 63.

<sup>20</sup>"Libel Suit May Develop from UFO Hassle," Scientific Research, 13 May 1968, p. 11.

<sup>21</sup>Edward U. Condon, letter to Scientific Research, 27 May 1968, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup>"UFO Study Credibility Cloud?," Industrial Research, June 1968, p. 27.

<sup>23</sup>Daniel S. Greenberg, letter to Science, 25 October 1968, pp. 410-411.

<sup>24</sup>Lewis M. Branscomb, letter to Science, 27 September 1968, p. 1297. See also Philip M. Boffey, "UFO Project: Trouble on the Ground," Science, 26 July 1968, pp. 339-342.

<sup>25</sup>Denver Post, 2 May 1968, p. 18.

<sup>26</sup>U.S., Congressional Record, 90th Cong., 2d Sess., 30 April 1968, CXIV, Part 9, 11043; Wall Street Journal, 3 May 1968, p. 10.

<sup>27</sup>Denver Post, 2 May 1968, p. 4.

<sup>28</sup>U.S. House, Committee on Science and Astronautics, Hearings, Symposium on Unidentified Flying Objects, 90th Cong. 2nd Sess., 29 July 1968, p. 205; I will hereafter refer to this as Hearings. The transcript of the hearings is included without material submitted for the record in John Fuller, Aliens In The Skies (New York: Berkeley Medallion, 1969).

<sup>29</sup>Hearings, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup>Hearings, pp. 4, 5.

<sup>31</sup>Hearings, pp. 14-15.

<sup>32</sup>Interview with J. Allen Hynek, February 1972.

<sup>33</sup>Hearings, pp. 18-19.

<sup>34</sup>Hearings, pp. 21, 26.

<sup>35</sup>Hearings, p. 30.

<sup>36</sup>Hearings, pp. 86-98.

<sup>37</sup>Hearings, pp. 106, 107.

<sup>38</sup>Hearings, pp. 113-121.

<sup>39</sup>Hearings, pp. 131, 135, 137.

<sup>40</sup>Hearings, pp. 199-205.

<sup>41</sup>Hearings, pp. 214-224.

<sup>42</sup>Hearings, p. 238.

<sup>43</sup>Hearings, pp. 208-209.

<sup>44</sup>See APRO Bulletin from 1968 to present for list of scientists connected with the organization.

<sup>45</sup>New York Times, 17 January 1968, p. 14.

<sup>46</sup>"Review of the University of Colorado Report on Unidentified Flying Objects by a Panel of the National Academy of Sciences" (National Academy of Sciences, 1969), pp. 1-6. (Mimeographed; NICAP and in the Air Force Archives at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama, to which I will hereafter refer as MAFB).

<sup>47</sup>Letter from Frederick Sietz to Alexander H. Flax, 8 January 1969 (MAFB & NICAP).

<sup>48</sup>Condon Report, pp. viii, x, xi.

<sup>49</sup>Condon Report, p. 9.

<sup>50</sup>Condon Report, pp. 245-280.

<sup>51</sup>Condon Report, p. 164.

<sup>52</sup>Condon Report, p. 256.

<sup>53</sup>Condon Report, pp. 143, 171.

<sup>54</sup>Condon Report, pp. 280-369.

<sup>55</sup>Condon Report, pp. 396-480.

<sup>56</sup>Condon Report, p. 407.

- <sup>57</sup>Condon Report, p. 1.
- <sup>58</sup>Condon Report, p. 5.
- <sup>59</sup>Condon Report, pp. 25, 29, 30-31.
- <sup>60</sup>Condon Report, p. 14.
- <sup>61</sup>Condon Report, pp. 6-7.
- <sup>62</sup>Philip Boffey, "UFO Study: Condon Group Finds No Evidence of Visits from Outer Space," Science, 17 January 1969, pp. 260-262.
- <sup>63</sup>New York Times, 11 January 1969, p. 30.
- <sup>64</sup>"The Truth About the Condon Report," UFO Investigator (Special Edition), January 1969, pp. 1-2.
- <sup>65</sup>UFO Investigator, February-March 1969, p. 2.
- <sup>66</sup>APRO Bulletin, January-February 1969, pp. 1, 5.
- <sup>67</sup>Cincinnati Enquirer, 13 January 1969, p. 13.
- <sup>68</sup>Press (Cleveland), 10 January 1969, p. B3.
- <sup>69</sup>UFO Investigator, February-March 1969, p. 5. See also Morning News (Wilmington, Delaware), 13 February 1969, p. 19; Daily Wildcat (University of Arizona), 3 February 1969, p. 6A.
- <sup>70</sup>J. Allen Hynek, "The Condon Report and UFOs," Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, April 1969, pp. 39-42.
- <sup>71</sup>Hynek, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, pp. 39-42.
- <sup>72</sup>Hynek, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, pp. 39-42.
- <sup>73</sup>Robert M. L. Baker, "The UFO Report: Condon Study Falls Short," Scientific Research, 14 April 1969, p. 41.
- <sup>74</sup>Frederick J. Hooven, "UFOs and the Evidence," Saturday Review, 29 March 1969, pp. 16-17, 62.
- <sup>75</sup>New York Times, 27 January 1969, p. 32.
- <sup>76</sup>Hudson Hoagland, "Beings From Outer Space--Corporeal and Spiritual," Science, 14 February 1969, p. 7.
- <sup>77</sup>New York Times, 8 January 1969, pp. 1, 2; 9 January 1969, p. 36; 10 January 1969, pp. 32, 46; 11 January 1969, p. 30; 12 January 1969, Sec. IV, p. 6.

- <sup>78</sup>New York Times, 10 January 1969, p. 46.
- <sup>79</sup>New York Times, 12 January 1969, Sec. IV, p. 6.
- <sup>80</sup>Wall Street Journal, 16 January 1969, p. 18.
- <sup>81</sup>Standard-Examiner (Ogden, Utah), 10 January 1969, p. 6A.
- <sup>82</sup>Herald-Examiner (Los Angeles), 19 January 1969, p. C-2.
- <sup>83</sup>Evening News (Buffalo, N.Y.), 11 January 1969 (NICAP).
- <sup>84</sup>Journal (Knoxville, Tennessee), 11 January 1969 (NICAP).
- <sup>85</sup>Post (Chattanooga, Tennessee), 14 January 1969 (NICAP).
- <sup>86</sup>Times Record (Fort Smith, Arkansas), 30 January 1969, p. 2-B.
- <sup>87</sup>Daily Gazette (Berkeley, California), 13 January 1969 and 14 January 1969 (NICAP).
- <sup>88</sup>Boffey, Science, 17 January 1969, pp. 260-262.
- <sup>89</sup>Alden Armagnac, "Condon Report on UFOs: Should You Believe It?," Popular Science, April 1969, pp. 72-76.
- <sup>90</sup>"Flying Saucers, Not Real But--," U.S. News and World Report, 20 January 1969, p. 6; "Shooting Down the UFOs: Condon Report," Newsweek, 20 January 1969, p. 54.
- <sup>91</sup>"Lost Cause: Condon Report," Nation, 27 January 1969, p. 100.
- <sup>92</sup>"Saucers End," Time, 17 January 1969, pp. 44-45.
- <sup>93</sup>U.S., Congressional Record, 91st Cong., 1st Sess., 1969, CXV, Part 1, 373-374.
- <sup>94</sup>Daily Citizen (Tucson, Arizona), 13 January 1969 (NICAP).
- <sup>95</sup>Edward U. Condon, "UFOs I Have Loved and Lost," Transcript of Presentation to American Philosophical Society, 26 April 1969 (typed; NICAP).
- <sup>96</sup>U.S. Air Force, "Project Blue Book," 1967, p. 1 (MAFB, NICAP, APRO). See also "Project Blue Book," 1966, and "Project Blue Book," 1968 (MAFB, NICAP, APRO).
- <sup>97</sup>"Project Blue Book," 1968 (MAFB, NICAP, APRO). See also, U.S. Air Force, Press Release, "Total UFO Sightings, 1947-1969," n.d. (MAFB, NICAP, APRO).

<sup>98</sup>William F. Marley, Transcript of Briefing to General William C. Garland, 7 July 1967, pp. 18-19 (MAFB). See also Raymond Sleeper to William Garland, 28 July 1967 (MAFB).

<sup>99</sup>William C. Garland to Raymond Sleeper, 2 August 1967 (MAFB).

<sup>100</sup>Letter from Raymond Sleeper to J. Allen Hynek, 4 September 1968, contained in Hynek, The UFO Experience, p. 167.

<sup>101</sup>Hynek, The UFO Experience, p. 167.

<sup>102</sup>Hynek, The UFO Experience, pp. 251-270.

<sup>103</sup>U.S. Air Force, News Release, "Air Force to Terminate Project 'Blue Book,'" No. 1077-69, 17 December 1969 (NICAP, APRO).

<sup>104</sup>Daily Star (Tucson, Arizona), 19 December 1969, p. 12 (NICAP).

<sup>105</sup>New York Times, 18 December 1969, p. 41.

<sup>106</sup>New York Times, 19 December 1969, p. 54.

<sup>107</sup>Interview with Stuart Nixon, April 1972.

<sup>108</sup>Interview with Richard Greenwell, April 1972.

<sup>109</sup>See APRO Bulletin, November-December 1971 for information on the Tucson Symposium. See also, Coral Lorenzen, ed., Proceedings of the Eastern UFO Symposium, 23 January 1971, Baltimore, Maryland (Tucson, Arizona: APRO, 1971).

<sup>110</sup>J. Allen Hynek, "Commentary on the AAAS Symposium," Flying Saucer Review, XVI (March-April 1970), 5.

<sup>111</sup>Donald I. Warren, "Status Inconsistency Theory and Flying Saucer Sightings," Science, 6 November 1970, pp. 599-604.

<sup>112</sup>"UFO, An Appraisal of the Problem," Astronautics and Aeronautics, November 1970, pp. 49-51.

<sup>113</sup>"UFO Encounter I," Astronautics and Aeronautics, IX (July 1971), 66-70; "UFO Encounter II," Astronautics and Aeronautics, IX (September 1971), 60-64.

<sup>114</sup>"UFOs Probably Exist," Industrial Research, April 1971, p. 75.

<sup>115</sup>Bruce C. Murray, "Reopening the Question," Science, 28 August 1972, pp. 688-689.

<sup>116</sup>Carl Sagan and Thornton Page, eds., UFOs: A Scientific Debate (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1973).

## CONCLUSION

The controversy over unidentified flying objects centered around two issues: identification and credibility. Identification was at the heart of the opposing positions. Credibility formed the basis for a continuing controversy.

Identifying unidentified flying objects was for the Air Force, the scientific community, and the civilian UFO organizations the most important issue. The problem of identification meant asking the most appropriate question. The history of the controversy demonstrated that these three groups usually failed to pose the most basic question: did UFOs constitute an anomalous phenomenon? Given the anecdotal nature of the data, the sighting reports of ephemeral objects, this question was the only remotely answerable one. All other questions about the origin of UFOs were either peripheral or highly theoretical. There was no way to determine the origins from available data. Because neither the Air Force, most scientists involved in the controversy, nor civilian UFO organizations focused on the limited issue of whether the phenomenon was anomalous, each group weakened its position and prolonged an interminable debate.

The Air Force, responsible for defending the national security against any attack from the air, was the first group to attempt to identify unknown flying objects. When Project Sign concluded in 1948 that the objects were not foreign secret weapons and did not threaten the national security, some staff members, in the "Estimate of the Situation," speculated that UFOs had to be extraterrestrial. Without first proving that

the objects represented an anomalous phenomenon, this conclusion was untenable. Indeed, it was future Air Force policy to reject the extraterrestrial hypothesis completely. But the Air Force based this policy on an unproven assumption--that UFOs were not an anomalous phenomenon.

By assuming that UFOs were not an anomalous phenomenon and therefore concluding that they could not be extraterrestrial in origin, the Air Force put itself in the position of denying the credibility of witnesses. People who reported UFOs, the Air Force said, either misidentified natural phenomena, lied, or suffered from delusions. This posed a credibility issue. The public, and especially people who claimed to have seen a UFO, found it difficult to believe Air Force "explanations" for strange observations. The 1953 Robertson Panel intensified the Air Force's need to explain all sightings as ordinary occurrences. By recommending that the Air Force reduce UFO reports to a minimum for the sake of national defense--so that reports would not clog military intelligence channels--the Robertson Panel encased the Air Force in a difficult public relations function. It had to protect the country not against the objects but against the reports. It gave out only limited information and kept its files classified, which prevented civilians from examining the data. Moreover, the mission the Robertson Panel gave the Air Force built a rationale for making misleading and sometimes deceptive statements to the public and to Congress. The Air Force believed it had to avert congressional hearings because they might create popular interest in UFOs and result in a flying saucer "hysteria."

Almost all scientists involved in the UFO controversy made the same logical leap as the Air Force. Operating within established concepts

of physical laws, some scientists argued that extraterrestrial craft were not visiting earth because the problem of overcoming the distance and time involved was too great. In addition, many scientists argued that if the objects were under intelligent control, the occupants most certainly would have made "official" contact with earth people. Few scientists confronted the basic question: did the objects constitute an anomalous phenomenon and, if anomalous, was the phenomenon natural or artificial? Instead, they dealt with the peripheral and unanswerable question of the objects' origins. Because they believed the objects could not be extraterrestrial, the preponderance of the scientific community concurred with the Air Force's conclusion that witnesses were either misidentifying natural phenomena, fabricating hoaxes, or laboring under delusions. The fact that most UFO reports were misidentifications supported this premise. The excesses of the contactees helped reinforce the claim of the Air Force and the scientific community that witnesses were mistaken. Moreover, the public linked the contactees with legitimate UFO investigators. In this way, the contactees seriously hindered the efforts of the national UFO organizations to make the extraterrestrial hypothesis respectable.

The leaders of the national organizations fell into the same trap as the Air Force and the scientific community. Keyhoe, the most vocal and influential representative of private UFO groups, assumed that UFOs were extraterrestrial and that proof of this "fact" lay buried in the inner reaches of the Air Force's classified files. With this conviction, Keyhoe naturally assumed that the Air Force was lying or conspiring to keep information from the public to prevent panic. But Keyhoe and NICAP did not bother to pose the fundamental question about the anomalous nature of the

phenomenon--they assumed this. Consequently, their secrecy and conspiracy charges were always weak. The Air Force, despite its classified data, could always truthfully claim that it had no evidence for extraterrestrial visitation.

The charges and countercharges of the Air Force, some scientists, and the national UFO organizations planted the seed of doubt in many people's minds about the Air Force's capability to handle the UFO problem. Recurrent sighting waves reinforced the doubt. The Air Force had to continue to tell witnesses that they had seen something "explainable." Hynek's "swamp gas" pronouncement in one case stretched credibility to the limit, as many people simply refused to believe him. Under tremendous public and congressional pressure, the Air Force finally had to establish the Condon committee to conduct a systematic study of the UFO phenomenon. But the committee made the same error as the others: it primarily concerned itself with the validity of the extraterrestrial hypothesis and not with the possible anomalous nature of the phenomenon. Finding no evidence for extraterrestrial origin of UFOs, the committee fell prey to the common mistake of concluding that UFOs did not constitute an anomalous phenomenon and therefore were not worthy of further study. Thus, during twenty-six years of the controversy neither the Air Force, the scientific community, nor the UFO organizations asked the one question that offered some possibility of empirical resolution. This failure perpetuated the UFO mystery and the confusion surrounding it. But from 1970 to 1973 UFO investigators and scientists interested in the phenomenon began to move back to the fundamental question of anomalousness. This

reorientation has already helped clarify some of the basic issues that muddled the old controversies, and at least promises a new phase in UFO research.

## A NOTE ON SOURCES

There is no central depository for documents and other material relating either to the UFO controversy or UFO sightings. Researchers must cull what they can from several public and private agencies. Although J. Allen Hynek has expressed interest in establishing a central depository for such material at Northwestern University, efforts to this effect had not come to fruition by 1973. Some private individuals, aware of the problem of sources, have begun collecting whatever documents they can for their private collections. I consulted three of the best private collections--those of J. Allen Hynek, the late James McDonald, and Richard Greenwell. For the researcher interested in the controversy, though, the Air Force and national UFO organizations are the best places to obtain material.

The Air Force Archives at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama, contain many Project Sign, Grudge, and Blue Book documents, which the Air Force declassified and transferred in 1970 from Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio. The voluminous collection of sighting reports includes a wealth of information about UFO report investigation and identification procedures. I found most of the major documents, reports, and studies in the unsystematically arranged project files. In addition, the project files contain many hitherto unpublished letters, memoranda, and other documents about the Air Force's struggle with NICAP, its attempts to avert congressional hearings, and its efforts to transfer

the UFO program. While providing much information about the Air Force's UFO program and policies, the project files are still disappointingly incomplete. Strongest on the 1953-1961 period, the files have few documents for the years before or after. Moreover, these potentially significant missing documents are not available from any other known source.

In the files of the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP), which moved to Kensington, Maryland, in 1973, I found essential supplemental information about NICAP's fight for congressional investigations and its struggle with the Air Force. NICAP files contain letters from the Air Force to congressmen and private citizens in addition to the organization's own correspondence. NICAP's collection also includes some of Donald E. Keyhoe's private correspondence with Al Chop, Edward Ruppelt, and other figures prominent in the early years of the controversy. Although not all of Keyhoe's correspondence is at NICAP, enough is there to provide invaluable supplementary material. The organization also has many Air Force documents, reports, press releases, and some office files--most of which are duplicates of the material at the Air Force Archives. NICAP's newspaper file includes many articles which it has collected from clipping services since 1957. The organization's book collection contains its own holdings as well as that of the defunct Civilian Saucer Intelligence of New York--making the book collection one of the most complete on UFOs in the country with many rare and out of print contactee books. Finally, NICAP's large sighting files do not significantly overlap the Air Force's and its investigations are more complete than the Air Force's.

The Aerial Phenomena Research Organization (APRO) in Tucson, Arizona, offered me access to the largest collection of UFO club and contactee periodicals in the country. The Coral Lorenzen-Donald Keyhoe correspondence at APRO is invaluable for an understanding of their early theories and the beginnings of NICAP. APRO also has a collection of Air Force press releases and reports and some Air Force correspondence with APRO members and private citizens. Most of the Air Force documents are duplicates of material in the Air Force Archives. APRO's sighting files supplement those at NICAP and the Air Force Archives and its investigation work is generally very good.

The Library of Congress has a limited but valuable collection of books and periodicals. It has some important contactee and UFO club literature unavailable elsewhere. The library's unspecialized motion picture collection includes a few movies with flying saucer themes and several interesting television films about UFOs, some dating back to the mid-1950s.

I found the facilities of the Wisconsin State Historical Society in Madison useful for researching newspaper accounts of the 1896-1897 and recent sightings. The most helpful newspapers for the 1896-1897 sightings were the Chicago Tribune, Chicago Times-Herald, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Dallas Morning News, Houston Post, Detroit Free Press, Sacramento Daily Record-Union, and Cincinnati Commercial-Tribune. For recent sightings and the controversy over them, I found the New York Times, Christian Science Monitor, and other major city newspapers indispensable. In addition, local newspapers in or near a sighting area contained important accounts of the controversy. I used the Denver Post and Boulder Daily Camera for information on the Condon committee's activities.

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