

SUNlite

Shedding some light on UFOlogy and UFOs

It is important to remember that, while every UFO is a potential IFO, there is no such thing as a proven UFO. It is simply a category to which a puzzling sighting is assigned pending further developments.

Jenny Randles (A few home truths - UFOs: 1947-1997)



Cover: A fleet of UFOs? No, they are just airplane contrails against the setting sun. These aircraft are very distance, much farther apart, and at different altitudes but they do appear to be in formation.

Left: Images and dialogue from the movie, "The messenger: The story of Joan of Arc". In this scene, Joan is convinced that finding a sword in a field was a sign from God. Her conscience shows her there were other possible explanations for the sword in the field without involving God.

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You didn't see what was...you saw what you wanted to see.

Gilles Fernandez recently posted a link to a video on a blog that was most interesting and can apply to UFOs. It involves a movie scene where Joan of Arc is wrestling with her conscience (played by Dustin Hoffman) about all the possibilities associated with finding a sword in a field. Joan feels that it was left by God. Her conscience then runs off a myriad of possibilities that were far more likely than the one she was convinced had occurred. He closes with the statement above, which could apply to a lot of UFO reports/cases and the investigators who promote them.

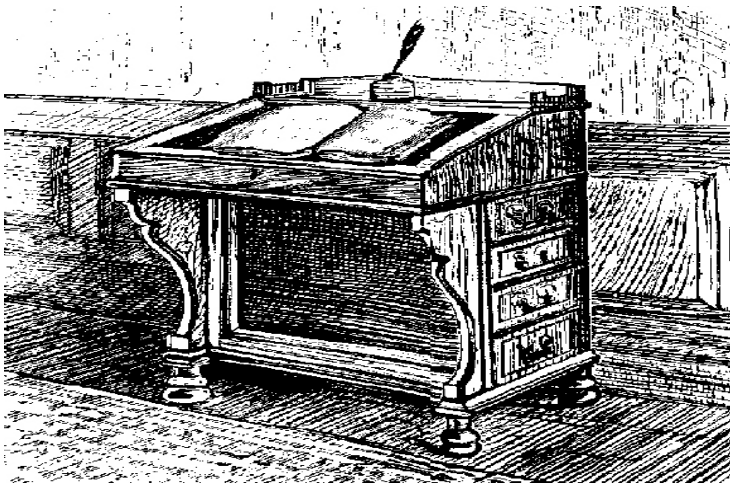
This mentality of seeing what one wants to believe was demonstrated when Herb Taylor decided to promote SUNlite's revelations on several UFO cases on UFO updates. I had told Herb that he should not waste his time discussing this with these various UFO lists because many of the participants seem uninterested in examining the explanations objectively. Instead of taking an intellectual approach, many allowed their personal prejudices and beliefs to interfere. The use of ridicule or name-calling was the typical response. It appeared that very few bothered to even read the articles or familiarize themselves with the details. Only one person, Don Ledger, bothered to present a detailed objection but his sarcastic arguments appeared to ignore a lot of the information that I had presented. I discuss his rebuttal of the two cases he took issue with on page 7.

Meanwhile, the Roswell dream team seems to have split because Rich Reynolds posted the story about the "new evidence" regarding Roswell. This evidence involves the "discovery" of some slides showing an alien body that were supposedly shot in 1947. While Kevin Randle appears skeptical of the slides, others on the team seem to be perfectly willing to believe they are authentic. However, the story that resulted was not about if they showed actual alien bodies but the efforts of Kevin Randle and Anthony Bragalia to mislead people into thinking that the rumors of the slides existence were not accurate. You can read all about it on page 4 in the Roswell corner.

Readers may find my article about identifying one of Betty Hill's UFOs interesting. I know my wife and I enjoyed taking a trip to East Kingston, NH with Kitty and Mark Mervine to view some lights from the same observing location for ourselves. The results of our investigation can be found on page 11. If that is not your cup of tea, you might find Peter Merlin's article about Ben Rich more to your liking. As always, I appreciate these contributions from others. You can find Peter's article on page 17.

Who's blogging UFOs?

Hot topics and varied opinions



Steve Bassett circulated an e-mail that outlined another one of his attempts to spur the US government into full disclosure. Bassett is going to send the DVD set of his \$600,000 dollar flying saucer fizzle to all 535 members of congress. He then plans to bombard congressional and presidential offices with e-mails and faxes to end "the truth embargo". Will Bassett end his "truth embargo" as well? Will he admit that some of his witnesses at the hearing are not being completely honest? Lt. Colonel Richard French has been revealed to be nothing more than a tall story teller. Will the DVD include this bit of information or will he withhold the truth? Bassett is a con man more interested in drawing attention to himself than any real interest in "the truth". For those that continue to contribute to his sham organization, I feel sorry for you as you are wasting your money. I am confident that Bassett will never accomplish anything other than promote himself. All people are doing is feeding his ego.

Speaking of Bassett, did he and Billy Cox really suggest that one of the reasons that the Citizen's hearing did not get much media attention was because of the Boston marathon bombings that occurred two weeks prior to their "dog and pony show"? I think Cox and Bassett continue to overplay how important they think UFOs are to the public and national media. It could have been a slow news week and people still would not have given it much attention. Bassett and company should be happy that the news media did not look too close at their little charade. Some intrepid reporters might have pulled the thread on some of these stories and discovered that the witnesses were not being exactly truthful in their testimony. I am sure Lt. Colonel French is happy nobody looks too closely at his false claims. Billy Cox should try performing some real investigative reporting and expose these lies for what they are. Instead, he seems to be nothing more than Bassett's puppet.

A Chinese rocket launch (Yaogan 17) produced an interesting display over Australia. One UFO aficionado filmed it and determined that its size was the size of an aircraft carrier. When James Oberg informed him of the source, the videographer became defensive and found reasons to reject the explanation. He also deleted comments from his Youtube video that mentioned the explanation. The object looks exactly like a rocket venting excess fuel. Why is it that UFO proponents refuse to learn from past events or refuse to believe the object they saw/recorded was something man-made/natural? A counter video protesting the deletion of the posts with the explanation was made by dazathecameraman. If there were any doubts about the source of the UFO, dazza would conclusively show it was the Chinese rocket body with this video.

High strangeness discussed the Tremonton film. Something I found rather disturbing in the author's article were the fact that the Robertson panel and the Condon study concluded that these were most likely seagulls and gave good reason for their conclusions. The author describes Delbert Newhouse as "the chief photographer" in the US Navy. Depending on the source of information, Newhouse had the rank of a Chief Petty Officer or Warrant Officer. While these ranks are high ranks, they are hardly the kind of rank that would carry the title of the "Navy's chief photographer". A chief petty officer/chief warrant officer is an experienced specialist in a given field (in this case a photographer's mate) and there were more than just one in the United States Navy. What Newhouse probably meant was he was "the chief photographer" for his specific command.

Jack Brewer discussed an interesting UFO case that occurred in the Casselberry, Florida area on July 4, 2004. Having lived in the Orlando area for several years (and I hope to return in the future), I was interested in the story. What followed was a rather interesting tale of rumors and suspected UFO crash landings. The genesis of this story is a bright flash of light and loud crashing noise during a heavy thunderstorm. It seems logical that this was the source of the story but subsequent retellings included NASA involvement and government silencing people. It seems to me that this is a Kecksburg incident replay. I suspect that in another ten or twenty years there will be annual festival complete with an alien parade.

Some recent UFO videos taken at a Vancouver minor league baseball team game were part of a publicity campaign for Vancouver's H.R. MacMillan Space Centre. The campaign was designed to announce the recently refurbished planetarium at the centre. You have to give them an "A" for the effort as they caught a lot of people's attention. I was pleased to see that MUFON's Marc Dantonio suspected a hoax before the news was revealed. It demonstrates that there might be some hope for MUFON.

On September 8th, Lisa Suhay saw some interesting objects in the evening sky shortly after sunset (about 7PM) from Norfolk, Virginia. She thought these unidentifieds were not aircraft and suspected that they might have been debris from the LADEE launch two days before. About the only explanation publicly explored by Alejandro Rojas was that these were parachutists with flares. He thought he solved it by reporting that a parachute team did a smoke drop that night at Suffolk executive airport. Rojas

Who's blogging UFOs? (Cont'd)

seems to miss the point that this airport was about twenty miles from the witness and these parachutists would not be visible from that distance. To me, her videos look awfully like the kind of contrails one sees in the evening sky after sunset (see image on this issues cover). As a check, I decided to look at the air traffic pattern the following Sunday (the 15th) in the Norfolk area. If these were airliners, the configurations would have been very similar. It is important to note that about 20 to 25 miles west of Norfolk is a high altitude airway used by commercial air traffic. There was plenty of air traffic between 6:30 and 7PM. A few minutes before 7PM, two airliners appeared as if they were going to collide (AWE 1876 and TCX635) west of Norfolk but they were at different altitudes (30,000



and 35,000). From the ground, it would appear something like the “near miss” the witness recorded on her phone. This information indicates that what she probably saw and filmed were aircraft and their contrails reflecting the setting sun (see front cover image). It is interesting to note that a similar situation occurred in Chichester England in October. In this case, the consulting astronomer made a positive ID that it was an airplane contrail.

MUFON keeps closing their case files as “unknowns”. As I stated last issue, there is only one reason to “close” a case file. That is to solve it. Either it is proof of an ET craft or it is something else. If you can not identify it, the case file should remain open and not closed. I think closing such cases is more of a reflection of the investigator’s inability to resolve the sighting than it is evidence for something extraordinary.

Dr. Stephen Greer was at it again. He apparently hired a security firm to escort him into the hall of a UFO conference. They then proceeded to lock the doors and restrict access to Greer’s lecture. Is Greer over the deep end thinking that he is being threatened or is he just a great con man, who likes to steal the show? Is it possible that we are witnessing Greer’s mental meltdown? Maybe he should be “locked up”.

While it does not have much to do with UFOs, an interesting series of photographs taken from the Canary islands showed an unidentified object come up from the western horizon and move southeastward. Various satellite observers thought it might have been a classified launch of some kind. Marco Langbroek hypothesized that it was a submarine launched ICBM test. This was confirmed a few days after he posted his analysis. A US submarine had launched a Trident missile as an ICBM test. There were similar sightings occurred in the mid-1970s that have been heavily promoted over the years as good UFO cases. These also turned out to be submarine launched Poseidon missile tests but you probably won’t read about that explanation at UFO web sites.

Paul Kimball was writing about UFOs for a short period but then closed his blog down again. It is too bad because his article about Robert Salas was interesting. He suggested that Salas is either lying about the Malmstrom missile shutdown or suffering from psychological issues because he now claims to have been abducted by aliens. It may not be that black or white but I have to agree with Kimball’s assessment of Salas. Salas seems to have made a lot of this story up.

The LADEE launch of September 6th from Wallops Island, Virginia generated some UFO reports as expected. I had observed the rocket launch from Manchester, NH with no difficulty and I was surprised how bright it was (brighter than a first magnitude star). There were two reports in the NUFORC database and four in the MUFON database that were probably of the rocket launch. I wonder if MUFON will consider them “case closed” with no identification?

It was announced that the Peruvian government was going to resume investigating UFOs. One wonders what they will discover. I predict that they will discover nothing that has not been learned before. They might find some interesting UFO cases but this will prove nothing significant. I just hope the people of Peru accept that their government is wasting financial resources that could be better spent on them. Let’s hope they will at least learn from the mistakes of Chile’s CEFAA, who had problems identifying bugs in some videos they tried to promote.

Spaceweather.com is now presenting daily results from NASA’s all sky fireball network. While the network does not cover the entire US, it does cover certain areas and can help identify those UFO reports caused by bright meteors.

The Roswell Corner

Rumor has it.....

Anthony Bragalia contacted me shortly after the release of SUNlite 5-5 complaining that I was doing nothing but spreading rumors that were not true. I would later be referred to as a "gossip girl". I found this all quite humorous since many of the stories that Bragalia writes about are based on second hand testimony, rumors and speculation.

The rumors he is upset about are the ones being stated by Rich Reynolds, which I had commented on in recent issues. I was skeptical about the rumors mentioned by Reynolds and felt that I had expressed this in my writings as I offered my opinions. In my opinion, there is a difference between this and blindly repeating these rumors as if they are facts. I allow Roswell proponents to do that sort of thing since they seem to be perfectly willing to blindly accept and repeat the rumors spread in books like "Witness to Roswell".

I pointed out to Mr. Bragalia that all he needed to do was to publicly renounce what Reynolds was saying in order to put these stories to rest. Bragalia said that he was too close to Reynolds to publicly denounce him and had no problem with him reporting what he "heard". This seems hypocritical in my opinion. He is offended by me discussing Reynold's rumors but it was OK for Reynolds to spread those rumors and make all sorts of statements that were, supposedly, not accurate.

Bragalia also scolded me for not checking with him before commenting in SUNlite! SUNlite is my publication and not Bragalia's so I am not sure why I would need to check with him about any story. Did Bragalia have inside knowledge about the "evidence"?

Since Bragalia contacted me about these rumors, I felt I would take him up on his offer about verifying if the story was true. I asked him for a public position on these questions:

1. Are there any photographs being examined or discovered by the "dream team" that supposedly show alien bodies or a military recovery operation from 1947?
2. If so, have these photographs been "shopped" around to television producers or other media outlets by any member of the "dream team" or the owner of the photographs?
3. Have any of the members of the "dream team" been involved in leaking this information to Reynolds?
4. In the case of question 3, if the answer is no, can you explain how Mr. Reynolds is receiving this information since there is a bit of truth to it?

The first three only required a Yes or No answer. The fourth was to elaborate on the apparent leak in the dream team's ship. My questions were designed to clear up the rumors he was so concerned about and end the shenanigans that had been played over at the UFO iconoclast(s)' blog. Bragalia refused to comment publicly stating I was blackmailing him even though I made no effort to contact Bragalia prior to this. I was only offering him a chance to clear the air about these rumors. His negative response indicated that even if I contacted him before commenting in SUNlite, as he stated I should have done, I would have been no closer to the truth of the matter. The articles would have been essentially the same.

This "rumor" that Bragalia wanted me to believe was not true exploded into a full fire storm just a few weeks after this e-mail exchange when Rich Reynolds let the "genie out of the bottle" on his blog.

Fire storm leads to a blog war of words

A few weeks after Bragalia's e-mails, an anonymous writer would publicly announce what the "new evidence" apparently was on Rich Reynold's blog. In a rather bizarre story, some Kodachrome slides were found by a woman, who was handling the estate of a Bernard Ray's widow. According to Reynold's source, Bernard Ray worked with Silas Newton and he took these photographs in the summer of 1947 near Roswell. To summarize, the woman apparently recognized the importance of the slides and gave them to her brother, who gave them to Tom Carey. At some point, according to this writer, somebody attempted to get CNN involved but they dismissed them because of their proponent status.

Many would comment about the information speculating on what it all meant. Among my concerns was the chain of custody issue. Why did the source go directly to a Roswell proponent when they could have gone elsewhere? Is it possible the bodies in the images are simply bodies from a car or airplane crash that were burned? Without more details it was hard to make an assessment of the evidence. It turned out that the slides themselves became secondary as the dream team began a form of damage control in order to stop the rumors.

Anthony Bragalia would jump into the public fray and declare the story, as told, was not true. He pretty much repeated what he told me in his e-mails. Paul Kimball, who had some inside information on this, would publicly respond that it was time for the "dream team" to come clean on all of this and tell everyone the truth about the slides. Bragalia responded that he would not publicly comment about any on-going research.

What broke everything open was Jack Brewer asking Kevin Randle directly about the slides. Randle would respond that he was not involved in investigating any slides. When Brewer published his article, Paul Kimball would state this was not true and prompted him to write his own article. That article included a private e-mail from Randle to Kimball, where he clearly states he was aware of the slides and the issues associated with them. Technically speaking, Randle did not lie to Brewer. He stated he was not involved in any investigation of slides and had not seen any slides. However, his failure to reveal that he was aware of the slides and that they

did exist makes him guilty of withholding information. Kimball revealing the private e-mail got all sorts of comments from Randle and Bragalia. Bragalia ended up referring to Kimball as a "double-crosser" and "squealer". For a person who blindly accepts the testimony of anybody "squealing" about an alien spaceship crash, I find his labeling of Kimball hypocritical.

Nick Redfern would also write an article describing his knowledge of the slides. He confirmed that there was an anonymous individual, who seemed to be interested in finding how much the photographs were worth. This confirms the rumor that there was some interest in obtaining monetary gain from these slides. One has to wonder how this individual learned about the slides. Was he the same person that had contacted Schmitt/Carey?

This brings us back to Anthony Bragalia, who would respond with an article where he decided to finally tell the "truth" about the slides. He quickly pointed the blame towards "skeptics" and "mean-spirited" individuals for trying to derail the "dream team". Bragalia also mentioned people were trying to "extort" him for information. He repeated the party line that "they" were trying to get all their information straight before releasing anything. Billy Cox would later state that Bragalia has personally seen the slides and that they showed an alien body up close and in color. I guess Bragalia felt it was OK to speak about the slides on the record to Cox but chose to evade discussing them when people started to ask more difficult questions. Bragalia made the incredible claim that the slides will never be revealed because of all of this. If that is the case, there must be something about the slides that makes people suspect they are fake or show something that is not really an alien. Bragalia received some negative criticism for his article simply because his original comments for Reynolds' story stated the story was not true. In reality, a good portion of the story WAS true (at least as far as we know it). They may have been no direct link to Aztec but the existence of the slides, how they were discovered, and that there was interest in their value, which is at the core of all of this, was pretty accurate. Several of the comments began to question Bragalia's already suspect credibility.

Kevin Randle would eventually publish a response that blamed Paul Kimball for creating discourse between he and the rest of the "dream team" by publishing their private e-mail exchanges. Kimball would respond with another blog posting stating that Randle had the ethical compass of a kumquat. Kimball received a lot of negative comments from UFO proponents (among them were Bragalia) and, shortly after this, Kimball would shut down his blog. This little blog war really did not resolve anything about the "evidence". All we really discovered is that Randle was skeptical of the slides and what they supposedly showed. As best I can tell the following is the case regarding the slides themselves:

1. There are two slides that show a body (or bodies) in, what appears to be, a morgue/hospital. The body (bodies) appears to be alien in nature
2. The slides were shot on Kodachrome film.
3. The slides may or may not have been tested to determine if they were from 1947 film stock. I question that it was possible to specifically date the film because it appears that only motion picture film stock has date coding of this type. The slide mounts themselves may indicate when the film was developed but it is possible that somebody can mount modern film in old mounts. The most important thing is that any testing that will be presented has to be aboveboard and independent of the UFO community. Based on their track record, I am concerned that certain members of the "dream team" will try to avoid releasing all information associated with any tests.

Even if the film can be identified as being from a 1947 lot, one has to wonder what the chances are that a fresh batch of Kodak film would have reached the photographer's local distributor by July of 1947. In 1947, I am not sure that the distribution of film was as rapid as it is today. It seems reasonable to conclude that while New York City would have fresh lots of film, more remote locations (like Roswell) would probably have pre-1947 film populating the shelves. Of course, just because the film was manufactured in 1947, does not mean the slides were actually shot in 1947! The date of film's manufacture probably is not going to resolve anything.

The two members of the "dream team", who are publicly commenting want to assign blame for all of this on people like Kimball and "skeptics/debunkers". In my opinion, the "dream team" should look itself in the mirror and blame themselves. Somebody could not control themselves about the slides and allowed the information about them to leak out. Who that individual is does not really matter. What matters is that the information became public knowledge through various channels and no amount of damage control could plug the leak. Instead of being elusive and misleading, they should have cleared the air right away once the story had appeared. They could have simply confirmed the details and stated the slides were still being examined.

I think the lesson learned in all of this is that keeping secrets of such information is not as easy as the crashologists claim it to be. In this instance, a very small group of people were aware of the slides but, somehow, the information quickly circulated. How is it that the "dream team" can't keep a secret between a few people but the US government was able to keep Roswell a secret for decades even though hundreds/thousands of people knew the truth?

The 1950 version of Roswell?

The story begins on March 28th, 1950 about 4:30 PM when a Concord, Pennsylvania farmer saw a bright shiny object descend onto his field. The farmer thought it might be a "flying disc" because of the way it appeared in the sky. Uncertain as to what it was, he gave the device to the principal of a nearby school. They had no idea what the device was and contacted the newspapers.

The newspaper began to ask about the device and, over the phone, described the object to several groups.¹ The responses were:

1. The Army signal corps at Fort Monmouth was certain it was not theirs and the description did not fit anything they were familiar with.
2. Henry Adams, head of the Philadelphia weather bureau, could not identify the object and it resembled no known object used by meteorologists.
3. Professor Jean Picard was not sure but suggested it might be one of his experimental devices that he sent aloft.
4. An ex-soldier, who saw the object, suggested it was a radar tracking device.

The paper knew the object had been suspended by a balloon, it was four feet across, and was constructed of white and silver paper on a wooden frame.

Comparisons

By now, you can surmise that what was found was a radar reflector of the ML-307 variety. This is exactly what was shown in the paper on the 29th (see below). By the 30th, once the visual image was released, many people quickly identified the object for what it was.

The 30th article also revealed how the device made it to the principal's office. According to the March 30th edition, the "farmer" was an ex-navy commander by the name of Robert Ramage.² Not surprisingly, the principal's name was Oleta Ramage. They were probably married or siblings. One has to wonder how a man, who rose to the rank of Commander in the navy, could be mistaken about something like this after seeing it. Wouldn't he have been exposed to radar reflectors during his tours in the Navy? It appears that, like Jesse Marcel, rank and experience does not guarantee one the ability to identify everything that they find.

A more compelling question is why couldn't the Army signal corps and Philadelphia weather bureau identify the target based on a verbal description? In the Roswell story, we see the same kind of confusion. The FBI telex stated that Wright field, based on tele-

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But he just couldn't be positive until he completes a checkup.

Not Radar Device

Army Signal Corps headquarters at Fort Monmouth, N. J., was "very certain" that the object hadn't been sent up by members of the staff there.

A Times staff member, an ex-GI, advanced the theory that the kite-like equipment was used for radar tracking.

But signal corps spokesmen said today it didn't resemble anything they knew anything about.

But let's go back to the beginning.

Sees 'Flying Saucer'

It all started at about 4:30 p. m. Tuesday when a farmer in his field—about one mile from the Concord School—saw spinning in the sky a large gleaming object which he first believed to be a "flying saucer," of recent legend.

The object was descending, and when it landed he approached it gingerly. What he discovered this morning was on exhibit in the corridor of the Concord School.

Mrs. Oleta Ramage, principal of the school, wanted to take it into her office, but it was much too large.

Four feet across at its maximum width, it was constructed of white and silver paper, on a thin wooden frame. Only identifying features on the strange-looking star-shaped object were the numerals 1946.

Balloon Breaks Loose

Obviously severed heavy strings were attached to a metallic ring on the object, indicating that a balloon had been hooked up to the "What-Is-It." The balloon apparently broke loose when the strings gave away, and continued its flight.

The farmer who first sighted the object reported this morning that, spinning in the late afternoon sunlight, it gave every appearance of being a huge disk as rays were reflected from the white and silver body of the object.

Authorities at the Bartol Foundation could give no explanation of the air-borne phenomena, nor could Henry P. Adams, of Alden, head of the Philadelphia Weather Bureau, or meteorologists on his staff identify it.

An aid at the Bartol Foundation was completely nonplussed, and expressed the opinion that it might have been released by "some naval air base station."

Adams was emphatic in that it resembled no known paraphernalia which might have been sent aloft by the weather bureau meteorologists.

But the kids at the Concord School—300 of them—had widely varying theories as to what it was. Predominant theory was—you've guessed it—that whatever it was it came from Mars.

"The children in science classes," said Mrs. Ramage, principal of the school, "are getting an enormous thrill out of the whole business. They're examining it most minutely, then letting imaginations run riot."

WHAT IS IT? ? ?—Concord Township School principal, Mrs. Oleta Ramage, and William Gunn, 15, of Concord rd., examine the foil-covered, kite-like object found in a field near the school, starting rumors of a "flying saucer" landing.

Times Staff Photo

Mysterious Object From Sky Has Concord Area Excited; Flying Disc Rumors Spread

By ORRIN C. EVANS

It was a good try, anyhow! We thought we had it; solution to the "flying saucer" mystery which for months has bedeviled people throughout the nation.

Now, however, we're ready to admit defeat—but not until we had kept approximately 1273 miles of telephone wires alive with queries.

Investigating

Prof. Jean Picard, noted Belgian air explorer and stratosphere explorer, was telephoned at the University of Minnesota, 1171 miles away from Chester.

He wasn't so sure about the strange-looking object found in a farmer's field in Concord Township at 4:30 p. m. Tuesday.

"But," he hesitantly said, "it might be one of my experimental mechanisms. They've been known to float in the air for three days and, on some occasions travel much farther away from here than 100 miles."

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phone conversations, did not think it was a radar target. It was not until the target arrived at Fort Worth was the positive identification made. In this case, the reflector was intact and not fragmented, like the Roswell event, making it easier to describe but it still could not be identified over the phone.

Is there a conspiracy angle here?

If I were a Roswell conspiracist, I would state that this was all staged to deflect attention away from the Guy Hottel memo or that this was part of the massive debunking effort to convince everyone that Roswell was still just a radar reflector. If you can convince yourself this was the case, you can convince others as long as they are willing to believe it.

Lessons not learned?

The lesson learned is that, three years after Roswell, people still confused radar reflectors for flying discs. The other lesson learned is that people have difficulty identifying such an object based on a verbal description. These factors played a critical role in the Roswell story and one wonders why the crashologists attempt to ignore or downplay them.

Notes and references

1. Evans, Orrin C. "Mysterious object from sky has Concord area excited; Flying disc rumors spread". Chester Times. Chester, Pennsylvania. March 29, 1950. Page 1-2.
2. "Concord's "flying disk" subject of much speculation." Chester Times. Chester, Pennsylvania. March 30, 1950. Page 1-2.

Facts are stubborn things

I am not surprised that UFOlogists would question some of the solutions that I offer but I expect better arguments than the ones I recently read. Don Ledger seems to find the explanations I have offered for the September 21, 1961¹ (SUNlite 5-5) and March 4, 1960²(SUNlite 5-3) sightings to be flawed. Since he has offered his complaints publicly on the UFO Updates list, I feel a need to explain how misinformed his arguments are.

USAF missed it on radar?

Reading Ledger's argument about the September 21 event, I noticed he mentioned that the USAF should have detected it on radar. I am not sure if Ledger was suggesting that the USAF could not explain it or that they should have mentioned it in the blue book files. In my original article, I pointed out that the USAF classified this as a missile exercise. They obviously did track it if it was a Soviet ICBM test. They had the radar systems in place on several of the pacific islands used to track their own missiles from Vandenberg. My guess is Blue Book probably would not have included any classified reports of their tracking radar's capabilities. They obviously had confirmation of some kind as they correctly identified the source. It was NICAP who could not identify this event as nothing more than an ICBM test.

Duration

Ledger kept repeating the duration of the September 21st sighting, as seen by the air crews, was ten minutes. I am not sure where he got this number because the documentation seems to indicate a lesser time frame:

1. NICAP's UFO investigator (October 1961) stated the BOAC crew saw the UFO from 50 degrees up and it took seven minutes to reach the horizon.³
2. NICAP's UFO evidence states the event lasted about ten minutes. However, they do not state the airplanes saw it for ten minutes. They state this was the duration for the planes and the ship. It was the report of the SS Iberville that apparently gave the value of approximately eight to ten minutes. The UFO evidence document does not give any times for the airplanes.⁴
3. The record card for Blue Book says the event lasted 6 minutes (it did not mention the sighting by the SS Iberville). The CIRVIS document regarding the BOAC sighting stated the event lasted approximately six minutes. The CIRVIS document regarding the Pan Am flight gave no time duration.⁵

One has to remember that all time durations and angular measurements have to be considered estimates and contain some margin for error. It seems the SS Iberville had the best view of the event and their time would be longest duration sighting. Based on that time estimate, it appears that the BOAC observation of six minutes was consistent with their observations. This CIRVIS report was made right after the event and should be considered to be the most accurate. Based on this information, Ledger's claim that the event lasted for ten minutes for the air crews appears to be invalid.



This image was taken from the International Space Station by Italian astronaut Luca Parmitano. It shows a launch of a Russian Topol ICBM on October 10, 2013. The description of the UFO seen by the air crews and Iberville was that it was a large halo with a bright center. This description is very similar to the image shown here.⁶

The trajectory

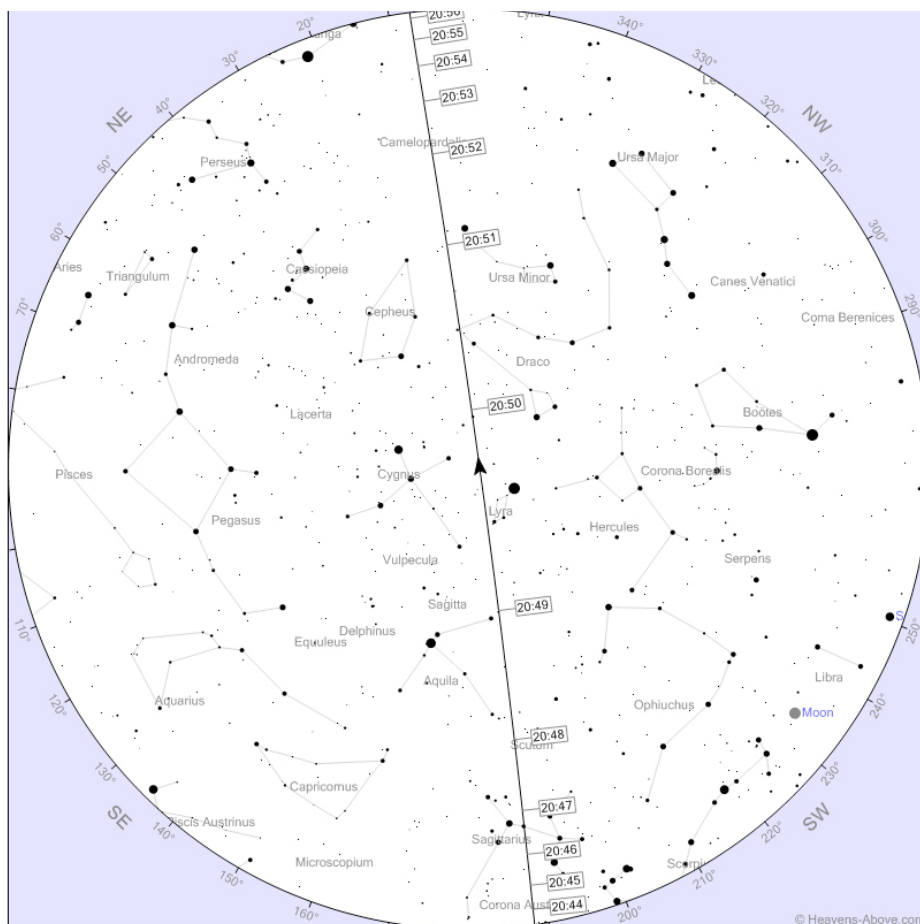
The trajectory of the missile was a ballistic track that went approximately 7600 miles. A precise measurement is not possible since we do not know exactly where the warhead landed other than it was probably 1000 miles southwest of Hawaii. Astronautix lists the maximum altitude of the ballistic missile as 830 miles. This probably occurred slightly more than half-way along the track northeast of the Japanese island of Hokkaido.

The SS Iberville and the BOAC were located between approximately 5000 (8047km) and 5700 (9173km) miles downrange. This is between 65 and 75% along the track. Determining the exact altitude is not possible but we can approximate those values. The trajectory is a ballistic curve and would not decrease in altitude greatly until the missile was close to its target. Even if the trajectory was flat, the lowest the missile would have been was about 400 miles above these locations.

According to Ledger, the BOAC could not have seen the object for as long as it did because the missile moved along its trajectory for 1400 miles during that time period. His values, while close to correct, were arrived at incorrectly. He based this distance using the improper time period of 10 minutes and missile speed of 8500 miles/hour. The actual speed of the missile was something like 15,000 mph and the duration was reported as 6 minutes. This means that missile moved about 1500 miles. With such a distance traveled, could the BOAC see the missile for six minutes? A factor not considered/mentioned by Ledger is the actual altitude of the missile during the sighting. Assuming the missile probably lost half this altitude by the time it reached the optical horizon and was at 200 miles altitude (and there is reason to suspect that it was higher than this) at the end of the observation, the distance the object could be seen before it went below the horizon was close to 1500 miles using the horizon calculator.⁷ So Ledger's main argument about the object being beyond the visible horizon is wrong and this objection to the explanation collapses.

A comparison

While an ICBM booster rocket/warhead is not a satellite, their appearance is similar to an observer on the ground. I thought it might be interesting to see how a satellite with an altitude of about 400 miles might appear to an observer, who was underneath the track. A search of Heaven's above produced a reasonable candidate in Cosmos 1515's rocket body. It has an orbit that is roughly circular with an altitude ranging from 608-634 km (378-394 miles).



On September 10th, Cosmos 1515 passed almost directly over my observing location.⁸ It went from horizon to horizon in just over 13 minutes. From ten degrees elevation to ten degrees elevation it took just under nine minutes. This is comparable to the 8-10

minutes reported by the Iberville to go from roughly horizon to horizon (they reported 20 degrees elevation to 20 degrees elevation but these values are approximations). To go from 50 degrees elevation to the horizon, Cosmos 1515's rocket body took about 5.5 minutes. Considering the approximate angles of elevations and times, this is comparable to the six minutes reported by the BOAC crew. As an additional note, the Cosmos rocket body was at a distance of almost 1800 miles when it reached the visible horizon.

The proposed September 21, 1961 explanation still stands

I found it interesting that Ledger's argument was not noticed as being flawed by all the brilliant minds in UFOlogy who frequent the mailing list. Had I made an error like this, I would have been publicly flayed alive. However, because Ledger is a prominent UFOlogist speaking as an authority on such things, nobody bothered to correct him for his mistakes. The bottom line here is Ledger's argument is incorrect and his rebuttal was based on his beliefs/desires and not an effort to examine the facts/evidence objectively.

The explanation I have proposed still stands and is probably the likely source of the UFO report. The appearance and behavior of this object is what one would expect from a booster rocket venting fuel in space. One would think that UFOlogists would be familiar with the appearance of a missile test like this. Instead, they seem more willing to ignore the characteristics of the sighting in order to classify it as some sort of alien spaceship.

The only item that will falsify this explanation is for somebody to demonstrate that the ICBM launch time was significantly different than the event. My estimate is the launch probably occurred between 1630 and 1650Z. I have made additional inquiries trying to find a source with the launch time but have been unsuccessful. It may be the case that there is no record of the launch even though it is a fact that it did occur on that date.

March 4, 1960 explanation questioned as well

Don Ledger also decided to contest the explanation I gave for the March 4, 1960 Dubuque Iowa sighting in SUNlite 5-3. The Blue Book file indicates that a formation of B-52s were probably the source of the sighting. An apparent clerical error prevented the sighting from being classified properly.

Ledger seems to think that, because the witness reported the aircraft were in line formation from one point of view, that was exactly what the formation was and, according to Ledger, B-52s can't fly in such a formation. Viewed from the side, a wedge formation of aircraft can appear as three aircraft in a line if the two rear craft are not parallel to each other (see image below showing a flock of geese in V formation seen from the side). I also found an image showing three B-52s in "trail formation"⁹ which indicates that three B-52s can fly in a line under certain conditions. In either scenario, Ledger's argument about the formation appears to lack substance.

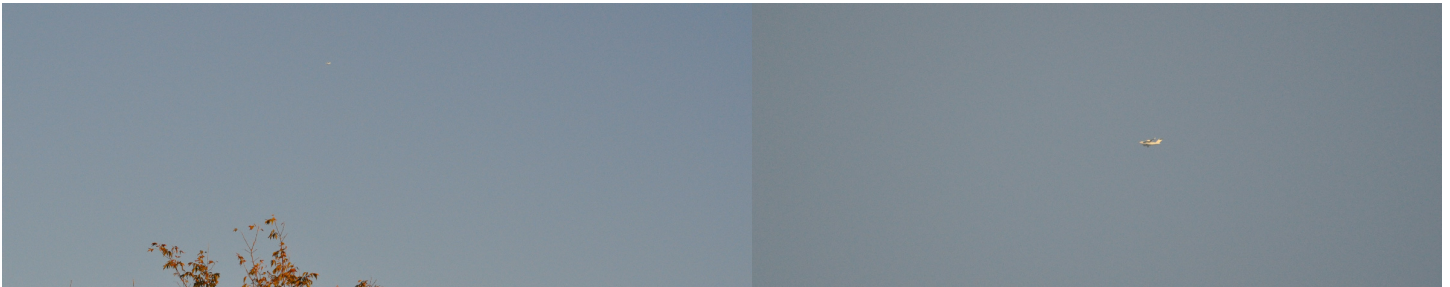


This flock of geese are not flying in trail formation but are in a "V". Viewed from this angle, they appear to be in a straight line.

Ledger's other assertions revolve around the inability of the primary witness to identify these as B-52s. According to Ledger, the witnesses should have seen the shape and exhaust of the aircraft. He seems to have ignored much of the information found in the blue book files, as described in SUNlite 5-3, which explain how erroneous these complaints are¹⁰:

1. The Strategic Air Command had records of a cell of B-52s flying at the time and direction the primary witness reported seeing and filming the UFOs.
2. A civilian UFO organization, CUFOR, reported interviewing at least three witnesses, who saw the UFOs as a formation of aircraft. Two of these witnesses, unlike the primary witness who made the report to Blue Book, saw them using binoculars. One stated the tails were like those found on B-52s.
3. Most of the witnesses, except the primary witness, reported seeing some vapor trails from these UFOs. The appearance of contrails are based on the conditions of the atmosphere the planes are flying through (see C-17 image on page 10).

4. From a distance of roughly 25 miles at closest approach, (see SUNlite 5-3 for ground track), the B-52s would be very small to the unaided eye and resolution of details would have been very difficult. They would have appeared disc-like especially with the sun on the opposite side of the sky. As a comparison, examine the two pictures below of a C-17 aircraft. The left is taken with a 70mm lens (about 2x magnification) and the right is with a 300mm lens. Based on angular size, I estimate the distance to be about 16 miles. The C-17 is longer than the B-52 and, in this example, was closer than the B-52s in the March 4, 1960 case. This indicates that the individual B-52s would have appeared smaller than the image on the left when viewed without optical aid.



5. The film did not show what the witness reported when analyzed by the USAF. The film has never been made public even though the witness had the film returned to him. The reason appears to be that the film does not show what the witness described.

All of these points indicate that it was very likely that the witness misperceived the B-52 cell flight as being a formation of elliptically shaped UFOs.

March 4, 1960 explanation still valid

The arguments presented by Don Ledger are inadequate and the B-52 cell flight is still a satisfactory explanation for the March 4, 1960 event. As with the ICBM test of September 21, 1961, he presents an apparently convincing argument but, after close examination, none of his objections are adequate to prove the explanations are invalid. Examination of the actual record demonstrates that Mr. Ledger needs to familiarize himself with the facts and evidence before pontificating from the UFO pulpit.

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Betty Hill's UFO headquarters

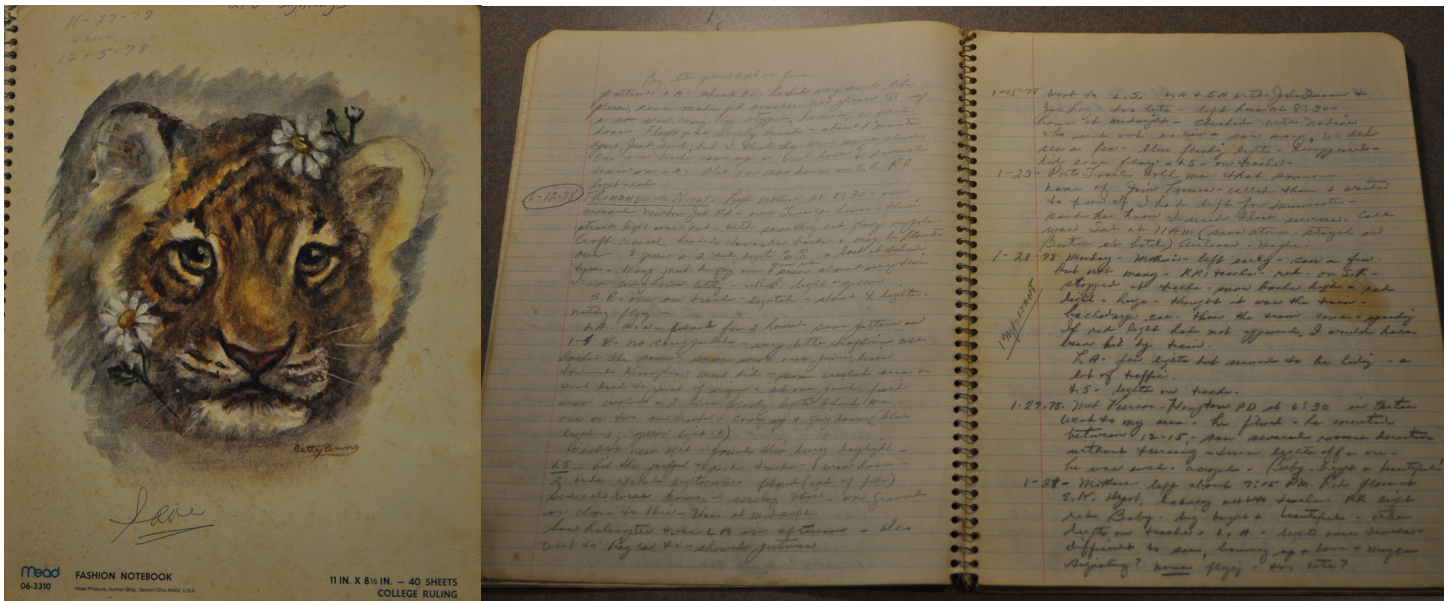
Late last year, fellow New Hampshire skeptic, Kitty Mervine described to me a trip that she had recently taken to one of Betty Hill's UFO observing areas. In our conversation, she reported seeing some unexplained lights in the distance after it got dark and asked me if we could go to the location to see what I thought. This was right before the holidays and I really could not think of such a trip before the spring thaw. Over the next year, I found one reason or another to excuse myself from taking the trip. Finally, this October, we got together to see if there was anything to the lights Kitty was seeing and how they might relate to Betty's UFO observations.

Betty's UFO sightings

Kitty informed me that she was told about the site's location from a UFO enthusiast, who often brought people out to the site to watch for UFOs. According to Betty, she was led to this location by UFOs:

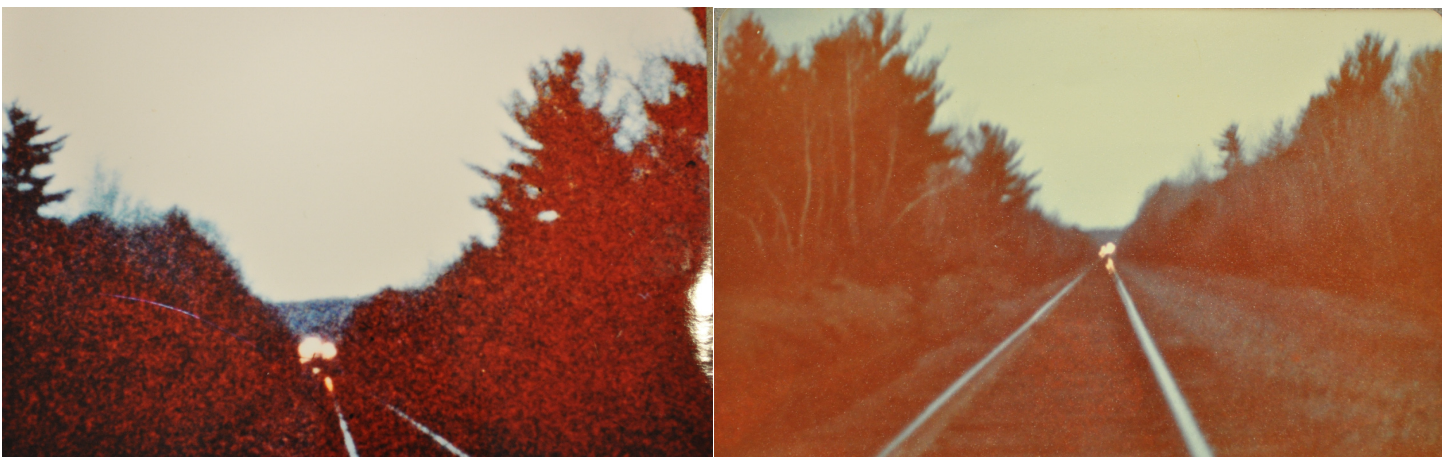
Driving to my mother's house at night and coming from her house at night....usually, I mean I would be paced by...we would have a UFO on each side of the car and then they would go ahead of us and we would follow 'em. And they led me to this spot....¹

Betty would come out to observe UFOs from this location (as well as a few other spots) and write about them in her notebooks. These notebooks can be found in the University of New Hampshire's Betty and Barney Hill collection.²



I found some of her notes a bit confusing because she used abbreviations to identify her observing sites. The location on the train tracks near East Kingston was identified as "SR", which stood for "Sanborn Road". Other locations were "LS" and "LA". LS appears to be "Linden street" in Exeter but LA is still a mystery to me.

The notebook entries are full of descriptions of lights in the sky and on the ground. Sometimes, she tallied the number of UFOs she saw each night in the margins. She even gave some of them names. There was one particular UFO that she had a fondness for because it always was landing on the tracks near Sanborn Road.



Two photographs from the Betty Hill collection showing "baby" at the end of the tracks.³

Betty's UFO photographs

At the UNH Betty Hill collection there are several photographs of lights that were visible on the train tracks from her SR observing site. Many of them look like some sort of ground lighting in the distance but Betty felt they were important enough to photograph.



What I did not find in the collection was the exact photograph that Betty showed to John Horrigan back in 1999.⁴ In that interview, she made the claim that it was a UFO headquarters, which gave orders to all the other UFOs in the area:

Betty Hill: *OK...this one would come in every night and land.*

John Horrigan: *The same spot or same general vicinity?*

Betty Hill: *Yep...same general area and others would come in, fly up to this one, and then go on....So, I would call this one the headquarters. This is where they came in and got their orders for the night.*⁵

Betty makes this description about a light/UFO at the end of the tracks often in her notebooks. She appears to have given this particular UFO the name "baby" and was always on the lookout for it. Sometimes "baby" was easy to see and not so easy on other nights.⁶



The viewing site in 1978 (left)⁷ and in 2013 (right)⁸



To the viewing site

After meeting Kitty and her husband, Mark, in East Kingston, my wife, Pollyann, and I followed them to the Sanborn Road observing site. The location feels and appears remote even though there were plenty of houses nearby. Many of these did not exist in the late 1970s. Kitty described to us how Betty always reported seeing UFOs land on the tracks in the direction of East Kingston but never in the opposite direction. It was towards East Kingston that Kitty and her husband had seen the lights at the end of the track. After a short period of time looking at the location in daylight, we took time to go to dinner before returning after sunset.



Kitty, Pollyann, and myself look down the tracks during daylight.⁹

Darkness descends and the light(s) appear

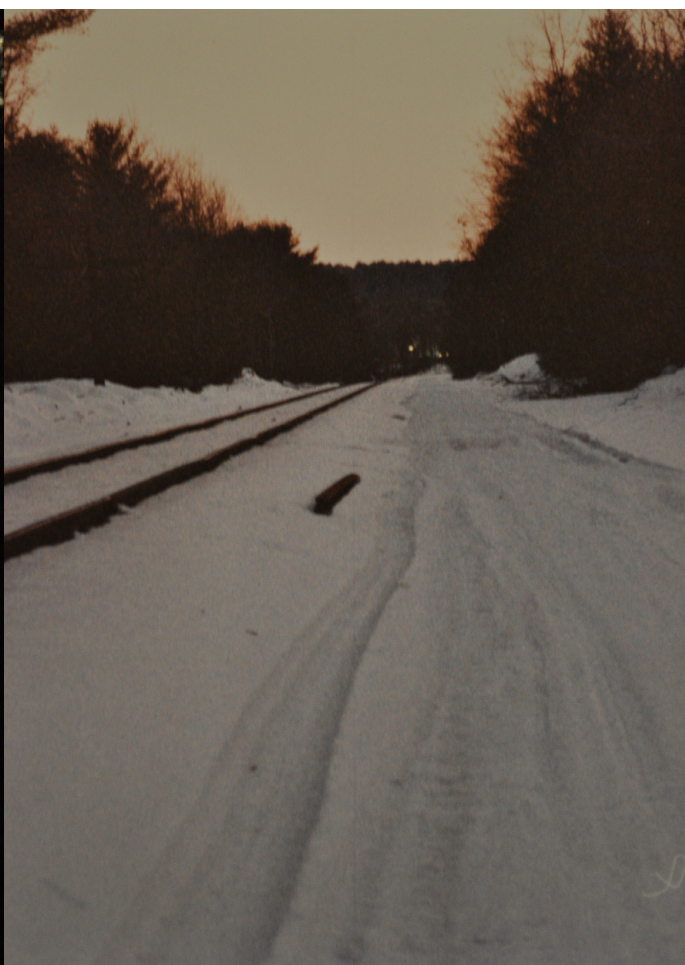
Arriving after dark, we looked down the tracks to see if the lights would appear. Kitty and Pollyann noticed one right away. Being over 6 foot, I could not initially see it until I stooped down. From this spot, the brightness of the light varied based upon where you were and your height.

Once we walked down the tracks a few hundred feet, the light became easier to see. I set up my Digital SLR with a telephoto lens on a tripod and took several photographs as well as some videos. I originally thought the light was steady and the only reason that the light varied in brightness was because I was not able to stand completely still while I was staring at the light. However, one of the videos on the tripod showed the light “twinkling” like it was a star.



Setting up my camera for a shot down the tracks.¹⁰

My photographs looked very much like some of the photographs in the Betty Hill collection (although mine had an airplane pass above it).¹¹ Other photographs Betty took showed brighter lighting (see page 11). Exactly what these lights were was the question and a little detective work was about to solve this mystery.





A sighting line along the tracks points directly towards the town hall and fire house (left).¹² Both of these existed in 1971 (right).¹³

The explanation

It did not take a lot of rocket science to figure out what we were seeing. Looking at Google earth on his tablet, Mark Mervine quickly identified that, when looking down the path of the tracks, one ends up at the East Kingston town hall and fire department about a mile away. The photographs revealed that there was the faint shape of a building with the lights in locations to the left and right of it. The foliage on the trees tended to obscure most of the structure and, when the wind blew, it would cause the light to “twinkle”. For somebody observing the lights with the naked eye in the dark, one would be hard pressed to easily identify what they were.

Despite it being dark, we decided to go to the next railroad crossing down the tracks, where the town hall was located. In front of the building was a street light. There were also security lights in the back (see view from the rear below left) as well as a parking lot. Talking to Mark and Kitty Mervine, they stated they could see additional lights of different colors that moved back and forth near the main lights when they went there in late October of 2012. What they were probably seeing were car headlights and taillights passing in front of the buildings. By then, more of the leaves from the trees had fallen and allowed a better view of the road through the gaps between the buildings.

In addition to the parking lot and security lighting, there were also two vertical windows in the back of the building. If the lights were on inside the building, it could leak out in the direction of the train tracks. Depending on the time of year and activity in and around the town hall, the lighting would appear different from night to night as viewed from Sanborn road.



While we were out in front of the town hall, a local fireman came out and my wife asked him some questions. He was a long time resident of the area and stated that in the 1970s, the light in front of the town hall existed. He also pointed out that the fire hall center

section had not been added until the 1980s. Examining the historical aerials web site on line, I was able to verify this last statement. We don't know how many trees existed in the 1970s between the town hall and the observing site but it seems reasonable that it was pretty similar to what we see today.

I think it is safe to conclude that Betty's UFO headquarters (AKA "Baby") was probably caused by the lighting in and around the East Kingston Town Hall. With this stimulus present, it only took Betty's belief in alien visitation and imagination to create the illusion of a landed spaceship.

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Taking E.T. Home: Birth of a Modern Myth

By Peter W. Merlin



One of the world's foremost aeronautical engineers stunned UFO researchers by apparently admitting personal knowledge of technology for interstellar travel during a March 1993 lecture at the University of California, Los Angeles. Jan Harzan, now executive director of Mutual UFO Network (MUFON), attended the event and shared his story in a January 2012 interview with Web Talk Radio Network, and again with Alejandro Rojas of Open Minds UFO News and Investigations in July 2013. Harzan said he attended the presentation with fellow UCLA engineering alumnus and UFO enthusiast Tom Keller because the featured speaker was Ben R. Rich, former president of Lockheed's Advanced Development Projects (ADP) division that is best known as the Skunk Works and has a reputation for developing cutting-edge aerospace technology.

Rich had a long and distinguished career highlighted by his involvement with designing the world's highest-flying and fastest jet aircraft, and others that redefined the future of military aviation. After working in Lockheed's main plant in Burbank for several years, he

joined the Skunk Works group in 1954 as a thermodynamicist on the XF-104 project where he helped design a prototype jet-powered interceptor capable of speeds in excess of 1,300 miles per hour. He later served as senior design engineer for the U-2 high-altitude reconnaissance plane, and helped develop the Blackbird family of high-speed aircraft that included the A-12, YF-12, and SR-71. In 1975, he became head of ADP and oversaw development of several of the very first stealth vehicles, aircraft that were virtually invisible to radar detection. Nearly all of the programs he worked on began as top-secret, special-access "black" projects that were tested at the infamous Area 51 in Nevada, focus of much UFO lore.

Rich was a member of the National Academy of Engineering and winner of numerous awards including the 1989 Collier Trophy and Department of Defense Medal for Distinguished Public Service. He retired from Lockheed ADP in 1990, but continued to serve as a consultant for government and industry. Throughout his career and after retirement, until shortly before his death from cancer in January 1995, he traveled the country giving presentations on the accomplishments of the Skunk Works.

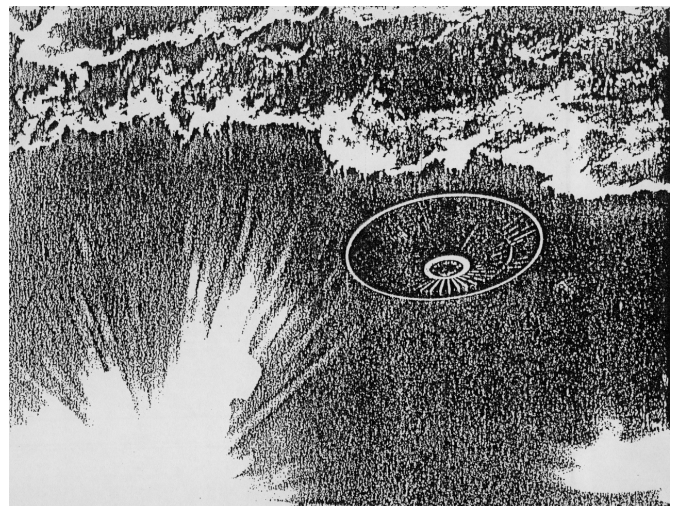
"Joke 'em if they can't take a..."

His lecture at the 1993 UCLA alumni meeting was well attended. Harzan and Keller joined an audience that by Harzan's account included some 200 engineers. During his presentation Rich showed about two-dozen slides highlighting many of the aircraft he had worked on, and dropped tantalizing hints about projects as yet unrevealed to the public. Toward the end he discussed the stealthy F-117A that was secretly flown for the first time in June 1981 but had not been unveiled by the Defense Department until November 1988, several years after achieving operational capability. He also spoke of the YF-22, a technology demonstrator that in 1991 had been named winner of the Advanced Tactical Fighter competition and served as a prototype for the F-22A Raptor. Further tantalizing the audience, Rich alluded to Lockheed's continuing efforts in the development of advanced aircraft technologies but expressed regret that he could not discuss them. "He intimated that there was a lot of other stuff going on that he could not talk about," said Harzan.

Rich then showed his final slide, a picture of a disk-shaped craft – the classic "flying saucer" – flying into a partly cloudy sky with a burst of sunlight in the background. According to Harzan, Rich ended his speech by claiming *"We now have the technology to take E.T. home."* The crowd laughed at this, as they were no doubt meant to, but Harzan and Keller were shocked. "Did he really just say that, and are these people really not getting that what he is saying is real?"

Well, the short answer is, no, he did not say that, not precisely. What Keller, an aerospace engineer who has worked as a computer systems analyst for NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, subsequently misquoted in the May 2010 issue of MUFON UFO Journal had become Rich's standard tag line. It was a joke he had carefully honed over the span of a decade, ever since a homely little alien endeared itself to movie audiences across the globe.

When Steven Spielberg's *E.T. the Extraterrestrial* was released in the United States on June 11, 1982, it opened at number one with a box office gross of \$11 million, and stayed at the top for six weeks. By



UNFORTUNATELY, I CANNOT TELL YOU WHAT WE HAVE BEEN DOING FOR THE LAST 10 YEARS. IT SEEMS WE SCORE A BREAKTHROUGH AT THE SKUNK WORKS EVERY DECADE, SO IF YOU INVITE ME BACK IN 10 YEARS, I'LL BE ABLE TO TELL YOU WHAT WE ARE DOING. I CAN TELL YOU ABOUT A CONTRACT WE RECENTLY RECEIVED (SLIDE 13). THE SKUNK WORKS HAS BEEN ASSIGNED THE TASK OF GETTING "E.T."* BACK HOME.

THANK YOU.

*EXTRA TERRESTIAL (FROM THE MOVIE OF THE SAME NAME).

1983, the film about a young boy befriending a lost visitor from space and helping the alien get home had superseded Star Wars as the highest-grossing film of all-time. The term "E.T." inevitably entered the general lexicon, and became what today would be called a meme, an idea spread from person to person within a culture. Standout images from the movie, such as the alien's glowing fingertip and a flying bicycle silhouetted against the full moon, were repeated in myriad forms and often parodied. Rich apparently decided to capitalize on this popularity, or perhaps the term had simply become embedded in his own psyche.

By the spring of 1983, he had added the flying saucer picture to the end of a set of between 12 and 25 slides that he showed with his lecture. Rich had long used a standard script for his talks, tailoring the content as necessary to accommodate his audience. Since most Skunk Works current projects were classified, it didn't matter whether he was addressing school children or professional aeronautical engineers; he always ended the same way.

"Unfortunately, I cannot tell you what we have been doing for the last 10 years," he opined at a Defense Week symposium on future space systems in Washington, D.C., on September 20, 1983. "It seems we score a breakthrough at the Skunk Works every decade, so if you invite me back in 10 years I'll be able to tell you what we are doing [now]." Having set the bait, he prepared to reel in his hook. "I can tell you about a contract we recently received," he intoned solemnly. Every ear in the room pricked up. The silence was palpable. "The Skunk Works has been assigned the task of getting E.T. back home." Laughter followed.

This was precisely the reaction Rich expected and hoped for since he began using the gag, at least as early as April 1983 during a presentation at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York. If something is successful, it is worth repeating. Rich gave a nearly identical speech at the U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, on September 6, 1984, and continued using his script during successive appearances. Sometimes he refined the details a bit. *"I wish I could tell you what else we are doing in the Skunk Works,"* he said, wrapping up a presentation for the Beverly Hills chapter of the National Society of Daughters of the American Revolution on May 23, 1990. *"You'll have to ask me back in a few years. I will conclude by telling you that last week we received a contract to take E.T. back home."*

Three years later he was still using the same line and the same slide. *"We did the F-104, C-130, U-2, SR-71, F-117 and many other programs that I can't talk about,"* he proclaimed during a 1993 speech at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, home of Air Force Materiel Command, the organization responsible for all flight-testing within the Air Force. *"We are still working very hard; I just can't tell you what we are doing."* As usual, he added his by now infamous punch line, *"The Air Force has just given us a contract to take E.T. back home."*

A Myth is Born

Few people noticed Rich's little joke until it caught the attention of Harzan and Keller during the UCLA presentation. Harzan now says that after the lecture ended a few people remained behind to ask questions. Some wanted to know more about the technology to "take E.T. home." Harzan says Rich initially brushed off these queries but eventually told one engineer, *"We now know how to travel to the stars. We found an error in the equations and it won't take a lifetime to do it."* Not surprisingly, this response spurred more questions. *"He didn't say what the equations were."* Harzan lamented, *"I'm assuming they are Maxwell's equations [on the generation of electrical and magnetic fields, and which form the basis of theories involving quantum electrodynamics]."* As things began to wind down, Rich said, *"I've got to go now,"* and started to walk out of the room. Harzan pursued him, and continued to question him on the workings of interstellar propulsion systems. Rich finally stopped and turned, then said to Harzan, *"Well, let me ask you; how does ESP work?"* Stunned, Harzan considered the question and finally stammered, *"I don't know. All points in space and time are connected?"* Rich responded, *"That's how it works,"* then abruptly turned and walked away.

Harzan and others have interpreted Rich's final comments as tacit admission that interstellar propulsion technology exists, that it is in the hands of U.S. scientists, and that it involves a specific set of known equations. But, taken in context, it sounds more like Rich knew he had carried his joke too far and talked himself into a corner. It is likely that he would have said, *"That's how it works,"* no matter what Harzan's answer had been. Even if Rich had said, *"Look, I was just kidding,"* it would have done no good. The damage was done.

Within the UFO community, Rich's words, and additional statements attributed to him without corroborative proof, have become gospel. He is named as having admitted that extraterrestrial UFO visitors are real and that the U.S. military has interstellar capabilities, and although nearly two full years passed between Rich's UCLA speech and his death in 1995, some believers have touted his comments as a "deathbed confession." According to one un-sourced quote, Rich allegedly stated, *"We already have the means to travel among the stars, but these technologies are locked up in black projects, and it would take an act of God to ever get them out to benefit humanity. Anything you can imagine, we already know how to do."* While it is demonstrably verifiable that he felt that some programs remained classified too long for no good reason, he also clearly understood both the occasional need for secrecy and the limitations of current technology. In a 1994 interview for Popular Science magazine, Rich said, *"We have some new things. We are not stagnating. What we are doing is updating ourselves, without advertising. There are some new programs, and there are certain things, some of them 20 or 30 years old, that are still breakthroughs and appropriate to keep quiet about [because] other people don't have them yet."*

According to another un-sourced quote, Rich supposedly said, *"First, you have to understand that we will not get to the stars using chemical propulsion. Second, we have to devise a new propulsion technology. What we have to do is find out where Einstein went wrong."* Indeed, those sound like the words of an engineer, and not one who already knew the secret of interstellar travel.

Rich was a brilliant scientist and an inquisitive person. He apparently believed in the existence of other intelligent life in the universe, though only as something distant and mysterious. In July 1986, after Testor Corporation model-kit designer John Andrews wrote asking what he thought about the possible existence of either manmade or extraterrestrial UFOs, Rich responded, *"I'm a believer in both categories. I feel everything is possible."* He cautioned, however, that, *"In both categories, there are a lot of kooks and charlatans – be cautious."*

(The author wishes to thank The Huntington Library, San Marino, California, for allowing access to material from the personal papers of Ben R. Rich, and for granting permission to reproduce images from the collection.)

The 701 Club

Case 6507 September 13, 1959 Bunker Hill AFB, Indiana

Berlinner's listing states the following:

Sept. 13, 1959; Bunker Hill AFB, Indiana. 4 p.m. Witnesses: at least two control tower operators and the pilot of a Mooney private airplane. One pear-shaped object, colored white, cream, and metallic, with a trail under it. Object showed little movement during 3 hours. Attempted intercept by USAF T-33 jet trainer failed.¹

The blue book record card summarizes the object as such:

Pear shaped obj size of a dime and orange, colors varied fm white, cream, & metallic. Obj had something trailing beneath it. Ghe (sic) general opinion was that the obj moved fm N to SW rising slightly. Obj was seen until dusk, at which time it became indistinguishable.

Blue book also lists the duration of the sighting as lasting over nine hours.

Details

The blue book case file is limited in details but it does provide us with some information:

1. It was first reported by a civilian pilot, who was heading towards La Porte, Indiana from Kokomo. He saw the object north of Bunker Hill AFB.
2. Bunker Hill AFB personnel in the tower saw the object at a bearing of 340 degrees at an angle of between 35-55 degrees.
3. The elevation angle remained the same (slightly increasing) as the object headed towards the southwest. It disappeared at dusk.
4. The object was first seen by base personnel at 1800-1900Z (1300-1400EST).
5. There were observations from off base as early as 1500Z (1000 EST) from Burrows, Kokomo, and Logansport, Indiana.
6. An AT-33 that was airborne was asked to investigate. The pilot flew to 37,000 feet but could not reach the object's altitude.

Blue Book Investigation

The investigation seems to have been inadequate. It was suspected that the object was a high altitude balloon and Blue Book contacted Lowry AFB to see if they had knowledge of any balloon launches on that date. They did not have any records of balloons being launched on the 13th but they did discover that General Mills, in Minnesota, had launched balloons on the 11th and 14th. The investigating officer, Captain Van Dyke, was quoted as stating, *"It is my opinion after careful study and analysis that this UFO was a balloon type unknown."*³

With so many clues that this was a high altitude balloon, one would think that the case would have been identified as a probable balloon. According to popular UFO lore, Blue Book rubber stamped just about any UFO case they could with just about any explanation. For some reason, they chose not to do so in this case and allowed it the privilege of appearing in the unidentifieds list. The record card simply states:

*Possibly Raven ind or Goodyear or other research organization balloon. However, since there is no confirmation this sighting is classified as "unidentified".*⁴

Balloon activity

A search of the newspaper archive revealed that there was some significant balloon activity in that region of the country during this time period. In addition to the balloon launches on the 11th and 14th of September, there were also several balloons observed, tracked, or recovered elsewhere.

1. The September 14th edition of the Ironwood daily globe (Michigan) stated that a large balloon was seen floating over the region for several hours on Sunday (September 13th) afternoon.⁵

2. The September 15th edition of the Beckley Post Herald (West Virginia) reported that a "new type weather balloon" that was "designed to reach an altitude of 200,000 feet" had landed Sunday night in Lincoln county (Southwestern West Virginia).⁶ The September 14th edition of the Charleston Daily Mail stated that the search was initiated by the Civil Air Patrol because residents saw it come down that night.⁷
3. The September 15th edition of the Harlan news-advertiser (Iowa) had a photograph of a helicopter that had landed at the local airport "last week". It was one of two helicopters that were pursuing a research balloon. This may have been a balloon launched as part of project ASH CAN from Sioux City, Iowa.⁸
4. The September 15th edition of the Mansfield News-Journal describes a mass sighting of a UFO on the evening of the 14th. This was identified as a plastic research balloon. This might have been the balloon launched from St. Paul on the 14th or, possibly, the 11th.⁹
5. The September 12th edition of the Stevens Point Daily Journal (Steven's Point Wisconsin) stated a "weather balloon" had been observed north of the city on the 11th of September and that the following morning it was visible southeast of the city. The Wisconsin Rapids paper nearby also would mention the balloon. The manager of the local airport thought the altitude was 8,000 feet but it could have been much higher. Steven's point was about 200 miles east of St. Paul. This was probably the 11th of September balloon that had been launched from Fleming field.¹⁰

Object In Sky Thought To Be Weather Balloon

The white object floating over Stevens Point is thought to be a weather balloon. The circular shaped object was spotted Friday afternoon high over the north part of the city. This morning it was visible southeast of here.

Kenneth Barlow, manager of the Municipal Airport, said that the object is probably a weather balloon sent up from Minneapolis, Minn. He estimated its altitude at 8,000 feet.

There seems to have been balloon activity of some kind that may or may not be related. Both Sioux City and St. Paul launched balloons on the 11th. The stratocat database has no information on what happened to these balloons and I could not easily find any documents mentioning these flights. The Ironwood sighting is intriguing because it was made about the same time as this Bunker Hill AFB sighting. They could not have been the same balloon because they were about 500 miles apart. We have no idea where that balloon came from either.



A potential source is that the balloon seen in Indiana was the one launched on September 11th from Minnesota. The Stevens Point journal had stated that they had a balloon pass over the city on the night of the 11th/12th and it was still airborne southeast of the city the morning of the 12th indicating a southerly trajectory. A little over 300 miles to the southeast of Stevens point was Bunker Hill AFB. In the map above, I put some of the pertinent information from the news paper reports coupled with the Blue Book file

reports. It presents a potential scenario that the high altitude balloon seen in Wisconsin on the 11th and 12th was probably the same balloon that caused the sighting in Indiana on the 13th. It then may have descended and high speed winds in the upper troposphere took it to a crash point in West Virginia 300 miles away or it could have shifted eastward and appeared in Ohio the following evening. While this does not prove anything, it is suggestive of where the balloon originated.

Solved?

As noted in the Blue Book record card, one can not call this "solved" without a positive identification. However, one can not really list this as "unidentified". There is enough information in the file to conclude that it is likely this was a high altitude research balloon. I would reclassify this as possibly/probably a research balloon.

Notes and references

1. Berliner, Don. "The Bluebook unknowns". NICAP. Available WWW: <http://www.nicap.org/bluebook/unknowns.htm>
2. "Project 10073 record card". Fold 3 web site. Available WWW: <http://www.fold3.com/image/8409961/>
3. "Flyobrpt from 305th bomb wing Bunker Hiill AFB to COMDR DETROIT AIR DEFENSE SECTOR CUSTER AFS/COMDR ATIC WRIGHT PATTERSON AFB OHIO/HQ USAF". DTG 162115Z. page 1. Available WWW: <http://www.fold3.com/image/8410008/>
4. "Project 10073 record card". Fold 3 web site. Available WWW: <http://www.fold3.com/image/8409961/>
5. "Plastic balloon soars high over Gogebic area." Ironwood daily globe. Ironwood, Michigan. September 14, 1959. Page 10.
6. "Here and there: The News ...in brief". Beckley Post-Herald. Beckley, West Virginia. September 15, 1959. Page 1.
7. "Balloon found near Branchland, CAP chief says". Charleston Daily Mail. September 14, 1959. Page 11.
8. "Helicopters land here". The Harlan news advertister. Harlan, Shelby county, Iowa. September 15, 1959. Page 1.
9. "Space-Jittery city shaken by balloon." The Mansfield news-journal. Mansfield, Ohio. September 15, 1959. Page 1.
10. "Object in sky thought to be weather balloon". Stevens Point daily journal. Stevens Point, Wisconsin. September 12, 1959. Page 1.

September 15, 1960

I had briefly mentioned this case in a "Who's blogging" comment in SUNlite 5-4 because Ted Molczan had "solved" it. However, I think it was important to elaborate on the case in this issue.

The UFO evidence document describes the case as follows:

*A Professor of Engineering, Central University, reported a UFO September 15, 1960. Prof. German Alvarez, in Carrizales, Miranda State, watched a luminous object sweep across the sky for about three minutes, after 7:30 p.m. The UFO accelerated in a curved course. Before disappearing behind mountains, it appeared as two objects.*¹

This is based on a NICAP report that had on file so it is difficult to determine how accurate the details were. It was not published in their UFO investigator.

What is not mentioned is that it was just one observation of a wide-spread sighting seen across the Caribbean. The Fort Pierce News Tribune carried a minor article on page 3 of their September 16, 1960 issue, which describes a bright fireball seen from Georgia and Florida.²

The January-February 1961 issue of Flying saucer review (FSR) seems to have recorded the same sighting. However, they appeared to have confused the dates. In one instance they stated it was September 15th and in another they stated it was the 16th. The time given was 8PM local time and the description of the object was:

*According to reports the object was round and as large as the full moon and brilliantly luminous. It seemed to be carrying three or four colored lights separated from the main body; it left a slightly luminous trail which vanished immediately. It was completely silent and flew at supersonic speed and at a relatively low altitude over the city of Caracas.*³

FSR then added the following commentary:

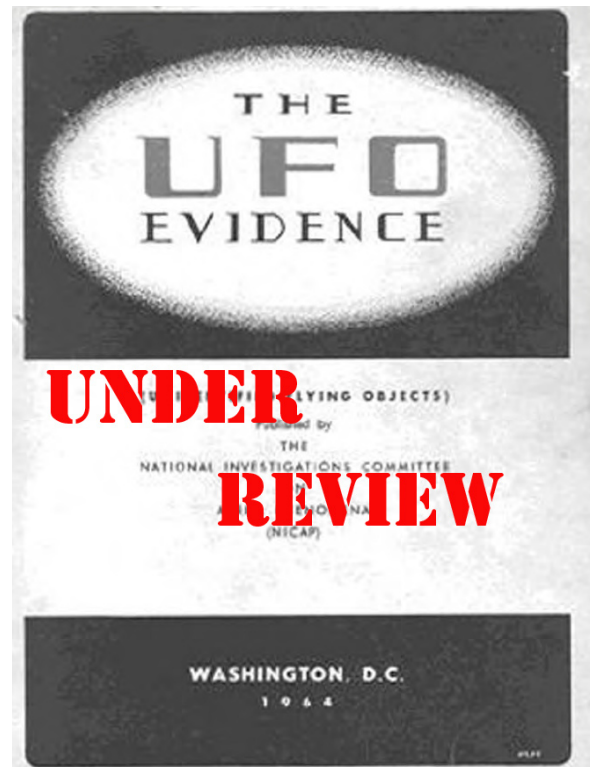
*The newspaper account then surveyed all the possible the explanations and was obliged to rule out the usual conventionalisations. Its intelligent conclusion that here was a true Unidentified Flying Object and one witnessed by so many independent observers that there was absolutely no room for scepticism.*⁴

It is also interesting to note that the same issue of FSR had a report from the Virgin Islands on the night of the 15th⁵, which is consistent with the description given in the Venezuelan sighting. FSR added that the Federal Aviation Administration could not identify that object either.

Project Blue Book's answer

Project Blue Book received many reports from various military bases in Puerto Rico, Georgia and Florida. Civilian reports (not the particular one found in the UFO evidence document) came from Venezuela, Aruba, and ships at sea.⁶ Many of the observers in Puerto Rico and Venezuela reported the object moving in a south to north direction. Observers in the United States saw the event in the eastern sky. The USAF concluded it was the break up of the "1960 epsilon vehicle" because it had an inclination of 64 degrees and parts of it reentered in September and October 1960. This appears to be a reference to 1960EPS, which was launched by the Soviet Union on March 15th. Due to an error, it did not re-enter the earth's atmosphere and it broke up into several pieces. While, the main part reentered in 1965, other pieces came down in September and October of 1960. It seemed logical but none of these pieces came down on that specific date. The correct designation appears to be Discoverer 14 as identified by Ted Molczan.⁷ It had an inclination of 79.6 degrees and was recorded as burning up on the 16th of September (UTC).

I performed a check of Molczan's identification using the Two-Line Elements (TLEs) from Johnathan's space page for the satellite.⁸ The last set of TLEs appear to have been for at the time of re-entry and did not work properly in Orbitron (the eccentricity of the orbit was "0") so I used the TLE's for September 10th. The result shows the following position for Discoverer 14 on the 16th of September



Fireball in Bright Fall

BRUNSWICK, Ga. (AP) — A mysterious brilliant white ball of fire plunged from the heavens Thursday night and many witnesses said it looked bigger than a meteor.

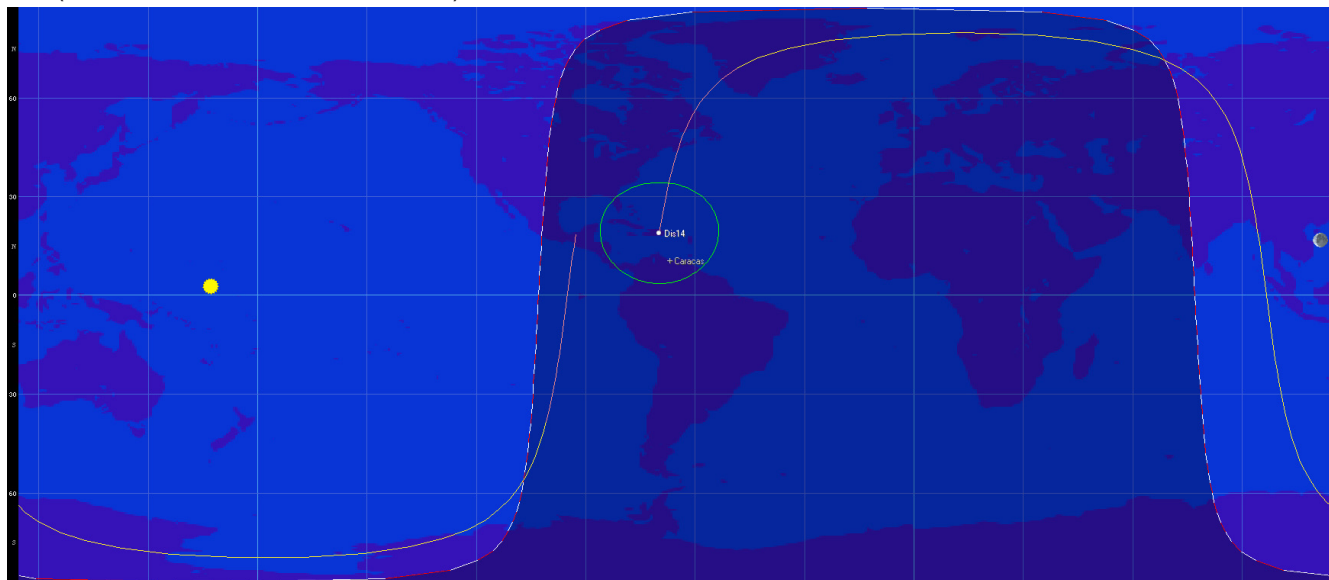
Scores of persons from as far away as Jacksonville, reported seeing the object, which appeared to fall to the northeast in the vicinity of Brunswick.

However, the Federal Aviation Agency quoted a passing transport pilot as saying he thought the object fell south of Jacksonville—some 80 miles south of here.

The air traffic control center at the Jacksonville airport said reports had been relayed from south of Miami, west of Tampa, and east of Charleston, S. C. The reports came mostly from aircraft.

The astrophysical laboratory at Boston said it probably was a common meteor and not a satellite or a rocket.

at 0045Z (1945 EST and 2015 VET on the 15th):



This position is not precise because it was not the exact TLE for re-entry but it is reasonably close. It demonstrates that the spacecraft was passing over this region at the general time in question and in the direction reported by the witnesses.

The times listed in the Blue Book files were between 0006 and 0030Z, which was between 1936 and 2000 Venezuela time (VET = Z - 4.5 hours). The observer in the UFO evidence document was described as having seen the object AFTER 7:30 PM local time. The FSR article gave a time of approximately 8:00 PM Venezuela time. Considering the potential for errors in time noted by the witness, the observations appear to be a reasonable match to the space debris re-entry.

Solved?

NICAP's inclusion of this report seems to be a case of not making a connection with all the other reports that night. Either they did not link the sightings to this one or were completely unaware they existed. Failure to follow-up and see the link demonstrated they did not bother to investigate the story. In my opinion, this one is solved as a satellite re-entry. It is not evidence of "manifestations of extraterrestrial life"⁹ as the document suggests.

Notes and references

1. Hall, Richard M. (Ed.) The UFO evidence. The National Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP). New York: Barnes and Noble. 1997. P. 121
2. "Fireball in bright fall". Fort Pierce news tribune. September 16, 1960. Page 3
3. "Puerto Rico: Hundreds of witnesses". Flying Saucer review. January-February 1961 P. 27. Available WWW: <http://www.ignacio-darnaude.com/ufologia/FSR,1961,Jan-Feb,V%207,N%201.pdf>
4. *ibid.*
5. *ibid.* p. 29
6. "Project 10073 record card". Fold 3 web site. Available WWW: <http://www.fold3.com/image/8228136/>
7. Molczan, Ted. Visually Observed Natural Re-entries of Earth Satellites (Draft). May 20, 2013. Available WWW: http://satobs.org/seesat_ref/misc/Visually_Observed_Natural_Re-entries_DRAFT_1.pdf
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UFOs on the tube

The Unexplained Files

I watched two episodes that involved UFOs. As always, I was interested in seeing how well they presented all aspects of the case and if I could learn anything. As with many UFO programs, I was disappointed.

The first episode recounted the Fredrick Valentich disappearance case from Australia. Mr. Valentich had mysteriously disappeared while on his way to King Island. His final communications described a UFO sighting, which made UFO enthusiasts conclude that Valentich had been "captured" by the UFO. Instead of attempting to look at the case objectively, the show went to UFO investigator George Simpson, who tried to demonstrate that all possibilities were impossible except for the alien spaceship scenario. However, the show did not even mention the recent release of files regarding the case. There is mention in those files of the plane running roughly prior to it disappearing as well as bits of the plane being found a few years later. Planes being lost without a trace over water is not that unusual. A recent skeptoid broadcast discussed these important details that were not mentioned in the program. It seems possible that pilot error or equipment malfunction may have played a role. Like Joan of Arc's sword in the field, UFOlogists see what they want to see.

During the program, we were shown the images of Roy Manifold that supposedly confirms UFO activity in the area. The photographs showed black splotches against a sunset sky background. It did not look very convincing to me and appear like something got onto the emulsion (a speck of dirt/debris) and blocked that section of the film from receiving light. When I used film, I used to get similar effects with some of my astrophotographs. That does not mean that it was the case here but it seems like a possibility to be considered. While mentioned, it was dismissed by the photographer himself. I guess analysis by an expert independent of UFOlogy was too much to ask.

The second program described an area of Argentina, which was considered a UFO hotspot. It started with a UFO event from 2009 that supposedly shut down all the power in the town. We are told there is no known reason for the power loss but this comes from the locals. The show did not bother to put any officials from the power company on the program. However, this sighting was not what this episode was really about.

This chapter recounted a strange event that occurred on August 17, 1995. On that date, two loud explosions were heard and the ground shook. Nothing was visually seen but it was thought that an airplane had crashed. A local UFO investigator took to the air in his private airplane and found a gouge in the ground on the hillside. While flying over the area, he claims that his plane behaved erratically but he skillfully was able to land the craft. The site had damaged/burned trees, dug up ground, and split/pulverized rocks but there is no evidence of what caused this. It is assumed that an alien spaceship created this but can one really draw that conclusion based on this kind of evidence?

Nobody bothered to provide a single aerial photograph of the area PRIOR to the event so one could determine if the damage was recent or not. There was no apparent effort to look into other possible sources. Was somebody conducting some sort of strip mining operation or attempting to clear the ground for other reasons? We do not know because the story tellers never bother to discuss this possibility.

I found both episodes one-sided and lacking any critical examination of what might have really happened. There is no real evidence to conclude that actual physical alien craft were the primary causes of either event. Like so many UFO shows, I feel like I wasted my time trying to learn something new. Instead, I got the same old biased interpretation of events where important information was left out.

Buy it, borrow it, or bin it

The Canadian UFO report

by Chris Rutkowski and Geoff Dittman

This was a book that I was expecting a lot from as it came from two respected Canadian UFO researchers. While the book had some ups and downs, I found it an informative read.

I was disappointed at how the book approached several high profile cases. The Shag Harbor incident was simply a retelling of the story found in the book "Dark Object" (most of the footnotes come from this source). Why didn't they simply write, "see the book, DARK OBJECT". The same could be said for the 1996 Yukon case. They simply repeated what the Martin Jasek concluded in his investigations. Had the authors attempted to check up on this case, they might have found the solution, which was revealed in 2012 by Ted Molczan.

I did enjoy reading about some of the cases. Unfortunately, they were often too brief leaving one with a desire to know more. The authors could have edited out some of the other materials in order to provide a more thorough accounting of these events.

I felt that the chapter regarding science and UFOs to be the same tiresome argument put forth by many UFO proponents. However, I commend the authors for noting that it is possible that UFOs might possibly be a psychological or social phenomenon instead of a physical one.

The heart of the book is the section on the UFO survey. The only thing we learn here is that than they could not explain every case. This is no surprise as it is consistent with all the other statistical studies about UFOs. It seems proponents are simply satisfied with saying some UFO reports are unidentified. There is no real mention of "the next step", which is what the data from these survey's should indicate.

Despite my negative comments regarding certain parts of the book, I still found the overall essay an informative work that should be in any UFO library. I recommend that readers buy it.