An extraordinary 95 percent of all Americans have at least heard or read something about Unidentified Flying Objects (UFOs), and 57 percent believe they are real. Former US Presidents Carter and Reagan claim to have seen a UFO. UFOlogists—a neologism for UFO buffs—and private UFO organizations are found throughout the United States. Many are convinced that the US Government, and particularly CIA, are engaged in a massive conspiracy and coverup of the issue. The idea that CIA has secretly concealed its research into UFOs has been a major theme of UFO buffs since the modern UFO phenomena emerged in the late 1940s.

In late 1993, after being pressured by UFOlogists for the release of additional CIA information on UFOs, DCI R. James Woolsey ordered another review of all Agency files on UFOs. Using CIA records compiled from that review, this study traces CIA interest and involvement in the UFO controversy from the late 1940s to 1990. It chronologically examines the Agency’s efforts to solve the mystery of UFOs, its programs that had an impact on UFO sightings, and its attempts to conceal CIA involvement in the entire UFO issue. What emerges from this examination is that, while Agency concern over UFOs was substantial until the early 1950s, CIA has since paid only limited and peripheral attention to the phenomena.

Background

The emergence in 1947 of the Cold War confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union also saw the first wave of UFO sightings. The first report of a “flying saucer” over the United States came on 24 June 1947, when Kenneth Arnold, a private pilot and reputable businessman, while looking for a downed plane sighted nine disk-shaped objects near Mt. Rainier, Washington, traveling at an estimated speed of over 1,000 mph. Arnold’s report was followed by a flood of additional sightings, including reports from military and civilian pilots and air traffic controllers all over the United States. In 1948, Air Force Gen. Nathan Twining, head of the Air Technical Service Command, established Project SIGN (initially named Project SAUCER) to collect, collate, evaluate, and distribute within the government all information relating to such sightings, on the premise that UFOs might be real and of national security concern.

The Technical Intelligence Division of the Air Material Command (AMC) at Wright Field (later Wright-Patterson Air Force Base) in Dayton, Ohio, assumed control of Project SIGN and began its work on 23 January 1948. Although at first fearful that the objects might be Soviet secret weapons, the Air Force soon concluded that UFOs were real but easily explained and not extraordinary. The Air Force report found that almost all sightings stemmed from one or more of three causes: mass hysteria and hallucination, hoax, or misinterpretation of known objects. Nevertheless, the report recommended continued military intelligence control over the investigation of all sightings and did not
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rule out the possibility of extraterrestrial phenomena. 6

Amid mounting UFO sightings, the Air Force continued to collect and evaluate UFO data in the late 1940s under a new project, GRUDGE, which tried to alleviate public anxiety over UFOs via a public relations campaign designed to persuade the public that UFOs constituted nothing unusual or extraordinary. UFO sightings were explained as balloons, conventional aircraft, planets, meteors, optical illusions, solar reflections, or even "large hailstones." GRUDGE officials found no evidence in UFO sightings of advanced foreign weapons design or development, and they concluded that UFOs did not threaten US security. They recommended that the project be reduced in scope because the very existence of Air Force official interest encouraged people to believe in UFOs and contributed to a "war hysteria" atmosphere. On 27 December 1949, the Air Force announced the project's termination. 7

With increased Cold War tensions, the Korean war, and continued UFO sightings, USAF Director of Intelligence Maj. Gen. Charles P. Cabell ordered a new UFO project in 1952. Project BLUE BOOK became the major Air Force effort to study the UFO phenomenon throughout the 1950s and 1960s. 8 The task of identifying and explaining UFOs continued to fall on the Air Material Command at Wright-Patterson. With a small staff, the Air Technical Intelligence Center (ATIC) tried to persuade the public that UFOs were not extraordinary. 9 Projects SIGN, GRUDGE, and BLUE BOOK set the tone for the official US Government position regarding UFOs for the next 30 years.

Early CIA Concerns, 1947-52

CIA closely monitored the Air Force effort, aware of the mounting number of sightings and increasingly concerned that UFOs might pose a potential security threat. 10 Given the distribution of the sightings, CIA officials in 1952 questioned whether they might reflect "midsummer madness." 11 Agency officials accepted the Air Force's conclusions about UFO reports, although they concluded that "since there is a remote possibility that they may be interplanetary aircraft, it is necessary to investigate each sighting." 12

A massive buildup of sightings over the United States in 1952, especially in July, alarmed the Truman administration. On 19 and 20 July, radar scopes at Washington National Airport and Andrews Air Force Base tracked mysterious blips. On 27 July, the blips reappeared. The Air Force scrambled interceptor aircraft to investigate, but they found nothing. The incidents, however, caused headlines across the country. The White House wanted to know what was happening, and the Air Force quickly offered the explanation that the radar blips might be the result of "temperature inversions." 13 Later, a Civil Aeronautics Administration investigation confirmed that such radar blips were quite common and were caused by temperature inversions. 14

Although it had monitored UFO reports for at least three years, CIA reacted to the rash of sightings by forming a special study group within the Office of Scientific Intelligence (OSI) and the Office of Current Intelligence (OCI) to review the situation. 15 Edward Tauss, acting chief of OSI's Weapons and Equipment Division, reported for the group that most UFO sightings could be easily explained. Nevertheless, he recommended that the Agency continue monitoring the problem, in coordination with ATIC. He also urged that CIA conceal its interest from the media and the public, "in view of their probable alarmist tendencies" to accept such interest as confirming the existence of UFOs. 16

Upon receiving the report, Deputy Director for Intelligence (DDI) Robert Amory, Jr. assigned responsibility for the UFO investigations to OSI's Physics and Electronics Division, with A. Ray Gordon as the officer in charge. 17 Each branch in the division was to contribute to the investigation, and Gordon was to coordinate closely with ATIC. Amory, who asked the group to focus on the national security implications of UFOs, was relaying DCI Walter Bedell Smith's concerns. 18 Smith wanted to know whether or not the Air Force investigation of flying saucers was sufficiently objective and how much more money and manpower would be necessary to determine the cause of the small percentage of unexplained flying saucers. Smith believed "there was only one chance in 10,000 that the phenomenon posed a threat to the security of the country, but even that chance could not be taken." According to Smith, it was CIA's responsibility by statute to coordinate the intelligence effort required to solve the problem. Smith also wanted to know what use could be made of the UFO phenomenon in connection with US psychological warfare efforts. 19

Led by Gordon, the CIA Study Group met with Air Force officials at Wright-Patterson and reviewed their data and findings. The Air Force claimed that 90 percent of the reported sightings were easily
Amateur photographs of alleged UFOs

Passoria, New Jersey, 31 July 1952
UFOs

Sheffield, England, 4 March 1962

Minneapolis, Minnesota, 20 October 1960
accounted for. The other 10 percent were characterized as "a number of incredible reports from credible observers." The Air Force rejected the theories that the sightings involved US or Soviet secret weapons development or that they involved "men from Mars"; there was no evidence to support these concepts. The CIA briefers sought to explain these UFO reports as misinterpretations of known objects or little understood natural phenomena. Air Force and CIA officials agreed that outside knowledge of Agency interest in UFOs would make the problem more serious. This concealment of CIA interest contributed greatly to later charges of a CIA conspiracy and coverup.

The CIA Study Group also searched the Soviet press for UFO reports, but found none, causing the group to conclude that the absence of reports had to have been the result of deliberate Soviet Government policy. The group also envisioned the USSR's possible use of UFOs as a psychological warfare tool. In addition, they worried that, if the US air warning system should be deliberately overloaded by UFO sightings, the Soviets might gain a surprise advantage in any nuclear attack.

Because of the tense Cold War situation and increased Soviet capabilities, the CIA Study Group saw serious national security concerns in the flying saucer situation. The group believed that the Soviets could use UFO reports to touch off mass hysteria and panic in the United States. The group also believed that the Soviets might use UFO sightings to overload the US air warning system so that it could not distinguish real targets from phantom UFOs. H. Marshall Chadwell, Assistant Director of OSI, added that he considered the problem of such importance "that it should be brought to the attention of the National Security Council, in order that a communitywide coordinated effort towards its solution may be initiated."

Chadwell briefed DCI Smith on the subject of UFOs in December 1952. He urged action because he was convinced that "something was going on that must have immediate attention" and that "sightings of unexplained objects at great altitudes and traveling at high speeds in the vicinity of major US defense installations are of such nature that they are not attributable to natural phenomena or known types of aerial vehicles." He drafted a memorandum from the DCI to the National Security Council (NSC) and a proposed NSC Directive establishing the investigation of UFOs as a priority project throughout the intelligence and defense research and development community. Chadwell also urged Smith to establish an external research project of top-level scientists to study the problem of UFOs. After this briefing, Smith directed DDI Amory to prepare a NSC Intelligence Directive (NSCID) for submission to the NSC on the need to continue the investigation of UFOs and to coordinate such investigations with the Air Force.

The Robertson Panel, 1952-53

On 4 December 1952, the Intelligence Advisory Committee (IAC) took up the issue of UFOs. Amory, as acting chairman, presented DCI Smith's request to the committee that it informally discuss the subject of UFOs. Chadwell then briefly reviewed the situation and the active program of the ATIC relating to UFOs. The committee agreed that the DCI should "enlist the services of selected scientists to review and appraise the available evidence in the light of pertinent scientific theories" and draft an NSCID on the subject. Maj. Gen. John A. Samford, Director of Air Force Intelligence, offered full cooperation.

At the same time, Chadwell looked into British efforts in this area. He learned the British also were active in studying the UFO phenomena. An eminent British scientist, R. V. Jones, headed a standing committee created in June 1951 on flying saucers. Jones' and his committee's conclusions on UFOs were similar to those of Agency officials: the sightings were not enemy aircraft but misrepresentations of natural phenomena. The British noted, however, that during a recent air show RAF pilots and senior military officials had observed a "perfect flying saucer." Given the press response, according to the officer, Jones was having a most difficult time trying to correct public opinion regarding UFOs. The public was convinced they were real.

In January 1953, Chadwell and J. P. Robertson, a noted physicist from the California Institute of Technology, put together a distinguished panel of nonmilitary scientists to study the UFO issue. It included Robertson as
I72enemies contemplating an attack on the harmful to constituted authority. inducing "hysterical mass behavior" The panel concluded unanimously sighcings. Nor could the panel find functioning" of the government by tion with Air Force interceptors. that continued emphasis on reporting might threaten the phenomena and use them to disrupt US air defenses. To meet these problems, the panel recommended that the National Security Council debunk UFO reports and institute a policy of public education to reassure the public of the lack of evidence behind UFOs. It suggested using the mass media, advertising, business clubs, schools, and even the Disney corporation to get the message across. Reporting at the height of McCartyhism, the panel also recommended that such private UFO groups as the Civilian Flying Saucer Investigators in Los Angeles and the Aerial Phenomena Research Organization in Wisconsin be monitored for subversive activities. The Robertson panel's conclusions were strikingly similar to those of the earlier Air Force project reports on SIGN and GRUDGE and to those of the CIA's own OSI Study Group. All investigative groups found that UFO reports indicated no direct threat to national security and no evidence of visits by extraterrestrials.

Following the Robertson panel findings, the Agency abandoned efforts to draft an NSCID on UFOs. The Scientific Advisory Panel on UFOs (the Robertson panel) submitted its report to the IAC, the Secretary of Defense, the Director of the Federal Civil Defense Administration, and the Chairman of the National Security Resources Board. CIA officials said no further consideration of the subject appeared warranted, although they continued to monitor sightings in the interest of national security. Philip Strong and Fred Durant from OSI also briefed the Office of National Estimates on the findings. CIA officials wanted knowledge of any Agency interest in the subject of flying saucers carefully restricted, noting not only that the Robertson panel report was classified but also that any mention of CIA sponsorship of the panel was forbidden. This attitude would later cause the Agency major problems relating to its credibility.

The 1950s: Fading CIA Interest in UFOs

After the report of the Robertson panel, Agency officials put the entire issue of UFOs on the back burner. In May 1953, Chadwell transferred chief responsibility for keeping abreast of UFOs to OSI's Physics and Electronic Division, while the Applied Science Division continued to provide any necessary support. Toddo M. Odarenko, chief of the Physics and Electronics Division, did not want to take on the problem, contending that it would require too much of his division's analytic and clerical time. Given the findings of the Robertson panel, he proposed to consider the project "inactive" and devote only one analyst part-time and a file clerk to maintain a reference file of the activities of the Air Force and other agencies on UFOs. Neither the Navy nor the Army showed much interest in UFOs, according to Odarenko.

A nonbeliever in UFOs, Odarenko sought to have his division relieved of the responsibility for monitoring UFO reports. In 1955, for example, he recommended that the entire project be terminated because no new information concerning UFOs had surfaced. Besides, he argued, his division was facing a serious budget reduction and could not spare the resources. Chadwell and other Agency officials, however, continued to worry about UFOs. Of special concern were overseas reports of UFO sightings and
claims that German engineers held by the Soviets were developing a "flying saucer" as a future weapon of war. 

To most US political and military leaders, the Soviet Union by the mid-1950s had become a dangerous opponent. Soviet progress in nuclear weapons and guided missiles was particularly alarming. In the summer of 1949, the USSR had detonated an atomic bomb. In August 1953, only nine months after the United States tested a hydrogen bomb, the Soviets detonated one. In the spring of 1953, a top secret RAND Corporation study also pointed out the vulnerability of SAC bases to a surprise attack by Soviet long-range bombers. Concern over the danger of a Soviet attack on the United States continued to grow, and UFO sightings added to the uneasiness of US policymakers.

Mounting reports of UFOs over eastern Europe and Afghanistan also prompted concern that the Soviets were making rapid progress in this area. CIA officials knew that the British and Canadians were already experimenting with "flying saucers." Project Y was a Canadian-British-US developmental operation to produce a nonconventional flying-saucer-type aircraft, and Agency officials feared the Soviets were testing similar devices. 

Adding to the concern was a flying saucer sighting by US Senator Richard Russell and his party while traveling on a train in the USSR in October 1955. After extensive interviews of Russell and his group, however, CIA officials concluded that Russell's sighting did not support the theory that the Soviets had developed saucerlike or unconventional aircraft. Herbert Scoville, Jr., the Assistant Director of OSI, wrote that the objects observed probably were normal jet aircraft in a steep climb. 

Wilton E. Lexow, head of the CIA's Applied Sciences Division, was also skeptical. He questioned why the Soviets were continuing to develop conventional-type aircraft if they had a "flying saucer." Scoville asked Lexow to assume responsibility for fully assessing the capabilities and limitations of nonconventional aircraft and to maintain the OSI central file on the subject of UFOs.

CIA's U-2 and OXCART as UFOs

In November 1954, CIA had entered into the world of high technology with its U-2 overhead reconnaissance project. Working with Lockheed's Advanced Development facility in Burbank, California, known as the Skunk Works, and Kelly Johnson, an eminent aeronautical engineer, the Agency by August 1955 was testing a high-altitude experimental aircraft—the U-2. It could fly at 60,000 feet in the mid-1950s, most commercial airliners flew between 10,000 feet and 20,000 feet. Consequently, once the U-2 started test flights, commercial pilots and air traffic controllers began reporting a large increase in UFO sightings. 

The early U-2s were silver (they were later painted black) and reflected the rays from the sun, especially at sunrise and sunset. They often appeared as fiery objects to observers below. Air Force BLUE BOOK investigators aware of the secret U-2 flights tried to explain away such sightings by linking them to natural phenomena such as ice crystals and temperature inversions. By checking with the Agency's U-2 Project Staff in Washington, BLUE BOOK investigators were able to attribute many UFO sightings to U-2 flights. They were careful, however, not to reveal the true cause of the sighting to the public.

According to later estimates from CIA officials who worked on the U-2 project and the OXCART (SR-71 or Blackbird) project, over half of all UFO reports from the late 1950s were accounted for by manned reconnaissance flights (namely the U-2) over the United States. This led the Air Force to make misleading and deceptive statements to the public in order to allay public fears and to protect an extraordinarily sensitive national security project. While perhaps justified, this deception added fuel to the later conspiracy theories and the coverup controversy of the 1970s. The percentage of what the Air Force considered unexplained UFO sightings fell to 5.9 percent in 1955 and to 4 percent in 1956. 

At the same time, pressure was building for the release of the Robertson panel report on UFOs. In 1956, Edward Ruppelt, former head of the Air Force BLUE BOOK project, publicly revealed the existence of the panel. A best-selling book by UFOlogist Donald Keyhoe, a retired Marine Corps major, advocated release of all government information relating to UFOs. Civilian UFO groups such as the National
In a meeting with Air Force representatives to discuss how to handle future inquiries such as Keyhoe’s and Davidson’s, Agency officials confirmed their opposition to the declassification of the full report and worried that Keyhoe had the ear of former DCI VAdm. Roscoe Hillenkoetter, who served on the board of governors of NICAP. They debated whether to have CIA General Counsel Lawrence R. Houston show Hillenkoetter the report as a possible way to defuse the situation. CIA officer Frank Chapin also hinted that Davidson might have ulterior motives, “some of them perhaps not in the best interest of this country,” and suggested bringing in the FBI to investigate. Although the record is unclear whether the FBI ever investigated an investigation of Davidson or Keyhoe, or whether Houston ever saw Hillenkoetter about the Robertson report, Hillenkoetter did resign from the NICAP in 1962.

The Agency was also involved with Davidson and Keyhoe in two rather famous UFO cases in the 1950s, which helped contribute to a growing sense of public distrust of CIA with regard to UFOs. One focused on what was reported to have been a tape recording of a radio signal from a flying saucer; the other on reported photographs of a flying saucer. The “radio code” incident began innocently enough in 1955, when two elderly sisters in Chicago, Mildred and Marie Maier, reported in the Journal of Space Flight their experiences with UFOs, including the recording of a radio program in which an unidentified code was reportedly heard. The sisters taped the program and other ham radio operators also claimed to have heard the “space message.” OSI became interested and asked the Scientific Contact Branch to obtain a copy of the recording. Field officers from the Contact Division (CD), one of whom was Dewelt Walker, made contact with the Maier sisters, who were “thrilled that the government was interested,” and set up a time to meet with them. In trying to secure the tape recording, the Agency officers reported that they had stumbled upon a scene from Arsenic and Old Lace. “The only thing lacking was the elderberry wine,” Walker cabled Headquarters. After reviewing the sisters’ scrapbook of clippings from their days on the stage, the officers secured a copy of the recording. OSI analyzed the tape and found it was nothing more than Morse code from a US radio station.

The matter rested there until UFOlogist Leon Davidson talked with the Maier sisters in 1957. The sisters remembered they had talked with a Mr. Walker who said he was from the US Air Force. Davidson then wrote to a Mr. Walker, believing him to be a US Air Force Intelligence Officer from Wright-Patterson, to ask if the tape had been analyzed at ATIC. Dewelt Walker replied to Davidson that the tape had been forwarded to proper authorities for evaluation, and no information was available concerning the results. Not satisfied, and suspecting that Walker was really a CIA officer, Davidson next wrote DCI Allen Dulles demanding to learn what the coded message revealed and who Mr. Walker was. The Agency, wanting to keep Walker’s identity as a CIA employee secret, replied that another agency of the government had analyzed the tape in question and that Davidson would be hearing from the Air Force. On 5 August, the Air Force wrote Davidson saying that Walker “was and is an Air Force Officer” and that the tape “was analyzed by another government organization.” The Air Force
confirmed that the recording contained only identifiable Morse code which came from a known US-licensed radio station.77

Davidson wrote Dulles again. This time he wanted to know the identity of the Morse operator and of the agency that had conducted the analysis. CIA and the Air Force were now in a quandary. The Agency had previously denied that it had actually analyzed the tape. The Air Force had also denied analyzing the tape and claimed that Walker was an Air Force officer. CIA officers, under cover, contacted Davidson in Chicago and promised to get the code translation and the identification of the transmitter, if possible.58

In another attempt to pacify Davidson, a CIA officer, again under cover and wearing his Air Force uniform, contacted Davidson in New York City. The CIA officer explained that there was no super agency involved and that Air Force policy was not to disclose who was doing what. While seeming to accept this argument, Davidson nevertheless pressed for disclosure of the recording message and the source. The officer agreed to see what he could do.9 After checking with Headquarters, the CIA officer phoned Davidson to report that a thorough check had been made and, because the signal was of known US origin, the tape and the notes made at the time had been destroyed to conserve file space.90

Incensed over what he perceived was a runaround, Davidson told the CIA officer that "he and his agency, whichever it was, were acting like Jimmy Hoffa and the Teamster

Agency officials felt the need to keep informed on UFOs if only to alert the DCI to the more sensational UFO reports and flaps.

Union in destroying records which might indict them.61 Believing that any more contact with Davidson would only encourage more speculation, the Contact Division washed its hands of the issue by reporting to the DCI and to ATIC that it would not respond to or try to contact Davidson again.62 Thus, a minor, rather bizarre incident, handled poorly by both CIA and the Air Force, turned into a major flap that added fuel to the growing mystery surrounding UFOs and CIA’s role in their investigation.

Another minor flap a few months later added to the growing questions surrounding the Agency’s true role with regard to flying saucers. CIA’s concern over secrecy again made matters worse. In 1958, Major Keyhoe charged that the Agency was deliberately asking eyewitnesses of UFOs not to make their sightings public.63

The incident stemmed from a November 1957 request from OSI to the CD to obtain from Ralph C. Mayher, a photographer for KYW-TV in Cleveland, Ohio, certain photographs he took in 1952 of an unidentified flying object. Harry Real, a CD officer, contacted Mayher and obtained copies of the photographs for analysis. On 12 December 1957, John Hazen, another CD officer, returned the five photographs of the alleged UFO to Mayher without comment. Mayher asked Hazen for the Agency’s evaluation of the photos, explaining that he was trying to organize a TV program to brief the public on UFOs. He wanted to mention on the show that a US intelligence organization had viewed the photographs and thought them of interest. Although he advised Mayher not to take this approach, Hazen stated that Mayher was a US citizen and would have to make his own decision as to what to do.64

Keyhoe later contacted Mayher, who told him his story of CIA and the photographs. Keyhoe then asked the Agency to confirm Hazen’s employment in writing, in an effort to expose CIA’s role in UFO investigations. The Agency refused, despite the fact that CD field representatives were normally overt and carried credentials identifying their Agency association. DCI Dulles’s aide, John S. Earman, merely sent Keyhoe a noncommittal letter noting that, because UFOs were of primary concern to the Department of the Air Force, the Agency had referred his letter to the Air Force for an appropriate response. Like the response to Davidson, the Agency reply to Keyhoe only fueled the speculation that the Agency was deeply involved in UFO sightings. Pressure for release of CIA information on UFOs continued to grow.65

Although CIA had a declining interest in UFO cases, it continued to monitor UFO sightings. Agency officials felt the need to keep informed on UFOs if only to alert the DCI to the more sensational UFO reports and flaps.66
The 1960s: Declining CIA Involvement and Mounting Controversy

In the early 1960s, Keyhoe, Davidson, and other UFOlogists maintained their assault on the Agency for release of UFO information. Davidson now claimed that CIA "was solely responsible for creating the Flying Saucer furor as a tool for cold war psychological warfare since 1951." Despite calls for Congressional hearings and the release of all materials relating to UFOs, little changed.67

In 1964, however, following high-level White House discussions on what to do if an alien intelligence was discovered in space and a new breakout of UFO reports and sightings, DCI John McCone asked for an updated CIA evaluation of UFOs. Responding to McCone’s request, OSI asked the CD to obtain various recent samples and reports of UFO sightings from NICAP. With Keyhoe, one of the founders, no longer active in the organization, CIA officers met with Richard H. Hall, the acting director. Hall gave the officers samples from the NICAP database on the most recent sightings.68

After OSI officers had reviewed the material, Donald F. Chamberlain, OSI Assistant Director, assured McCone that little had changed since the early 1950s. There was still no evidence that UFOs were a threat to the security of the United States or that they were of "foreign origin." Chamberlain told McCone that OSI still monitored UFO reports, including the official Air Force investigation, Project BLUE BOOK.69

At the same time that CIA was conducting this latest internal review of UFOs, public pressure forced the Air Force to establish a special ad hoc committee to review BLUE BOOK. Chaired by Dr. Brian O’Brien, a member of the Air Force Scientific Advisory Board, the panel included Carl Sagan, the famous astronomer from Cornell University. Its report offered nothing new. It declared that UFOs did not threaten national security and that it could find "no UFO case which represented technological or scientific advances outside of a terrestrial framework." The committee did recommend that UFOs be studied intensively, with a leading university acting as a coordinator for the project, to settle the issue conclusively.70

The House Armed Services Committee also held brief hearings on UFOs in 1966 that produced similar results. Secretary of the Air Force Harold Brown assured the committee that most sightings were easily explained and that there was no evidence that "strangers from outer space" had been visiting Earth. He told the committee members, however, that the Air Force would keep an open mind and continue to investigate all UFO reports.71

Following the report of its O’Brien Committee, the House hearings on UFOs, and Dr. Robertson’s disclosure on a CBS Reports program that CIA indeed had been involved in UFO analysis, the Air Force in July 1966 again approached the Agency for declassification of the entire Robertson panel report of 1953 and the full Durant report on the Robertson panel deliberations and findings. The Agency again refused to budge. Karl H. Weber, Deputy Director of OSI, wrote the Air Force that "We are most anxious that further publicity not be given to the information that the panel was sponsored by the CIA." Weber noted that there was already a sanitized version available to the public.72 Weber’s response was rather shortsighted and ill considered. It only drew more attention to the 13-year-old Robertson panel report and CIA’s role in the investigation of UFOs. The science editor of The Saturday Review drew nationwide attention to the CIA’s role in investigating UFOs when he published an article criticizing the "sanitized version" of the 1953 Robertson panel report and called for release of the entire document.73

Unknown to CIA officials, Dr. James E. McDonald, a noted atmospheric physicist from the University of Arizona, had already seen the Durant report on the Robertson panel proceedings at Wright-Patterson on 6 June 1966. When McDonald returned to Wright-Patterson on 30 June to copy the report, however, the Air Force refused to let him see it again, stating that it was a CIA classified document. Emerging as a UFO authority, McDonald publicly claimed that the CIA was behind the Air Force secrecy policies and coverup. He demanded the release of the full Robertson panel report and the Durant report.74

Bowing to public pressure and the recommendation of its own O’Brien Committee, the Air Force announced in August 1966 that it was seeking a contract with a leading university to undertake a program of intensive investigations of UFO sightings. The new program was designed to blunt continuing charges that the US Government had concealed what it knew about UFOs. On 7 October, the University of Colorado accepted a $325,000 contract with the Air Force for an 18-month study of flying saucers. Dr. Edward U. Condon, a physicist at Colorado and a former
Additional sightings in the early 1970s also fueled beliefs that the CIA was somehow involved in a vast conspiracy.

Condon and the same group met again in May 1967 at NPIC to hear an analysis of UFO photographs taken at Zanesville, Ohio. The analysis debunked that sighting. The committee was again impressed with the technical work performed, and Condon remarked that for the first time a scientific analysis of a UFO would stand up to investigation. The group also discussed the committee’s plans to call on US citizens for additional photographs and to issue guidelines for taking useful UFO photographs. In addition, CIA officials agreed that the Condon Committee could release the full Durant report with only minor deletions.

In April 1969, Condon and his committee released their report on UFOs. The report concluded that little, if anything, had come from the study of UFOs in the past 21 years and that further extensive study of UFO sightings was unwarranted. It also recommended that the Air Force special unit, Project BLUE BOOK, be discontinued. It did not mention CIA participation in the Condon committee’s investigation. A special panel established by the National Academy of Sciences reviewed the Condon report and concurred with its conclusion that "no high priority in UFO investigations is warranted by data of the past two decades." It concluded its review by declaring, "On the basis of present knowledge, the least likely explanation of UFOs is the hypothesis of extraterrestrial visitations by intelligent beings."

Following the recommendations of the Condon Committee and the National Academy of Sciences, the Secretary of the Air Force, Robert C. Seamans, Jr., announced on 17 December 1969 the termination of BLUE BOOK.

The 1970s and 1980s: The UFO Issue Refuses To Die

The Condon report did not satisfy many UFOlogists, who considered it a coverup for CIA activities in UFO research. Additional sightings in the early 1970s fueled beliefs that the CIA was somehow involved in a vast conspiracy. On 7 June 1975, William Spaulding, head of a small UFO group, Ground Saucer Watch (GSW), wrote to CIA requesting a copy of the Robertson panel report and all records relating to UFOs. Spaulding was convinced that the Agency was withholding major files on UFOs. Agency officials provided Spaulding with a copy of the Robertson panel report and of the Durant report.

On 14 July 1975, Spaulding again wrote the Agency questioning the authenticity of the reports he had received and alleging a CIA coverup of its UFO activities. Gene Wilson, CIA’s Information and Privacy Coordinator, replied in an attempt to satisfy Spaulding. "At no time prior to the formation of the Robertson Panel and subsequent to the issuance of the panel’s report has CIA engaged in the study of the UFO phe-
nomena. The Robertson panel report, according to Wilson, was "the summation of Agency interest and involvement in UFOs." Wilson also inferred that there were no additional documents in CIA's possession that related to UFOs. Wilson was ill informed.

In September 1977, Spaulding and GSW, unconvincing by Wilson's response, filed a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) lawsuit against the Agency that specifically requested all UFO documents in CIA's possession. Deluged by similar FOIA requests for Agency information on UFOs, CIA officials agreed, after much legal maneuvering, to conduct a "reasonable search" of CIA files for UFO materials. Despite an Agency-wide unsympathetic attitude toward the suit, Agency officials, led by Launie Ziebell from the Office of General Counsel, conducted a thorough search for records pertaining to UFOs. Persistent, demanding, and even threatening at times, Ziebell and his group scoured the Agency. They even turned up an old UFO file under a secretary's desk. The search finally produced 355 documents totaling approximately 900 pages. On 14 December 1978, the Agency released all but 57 documents of about 100 pages to GSW. It withheld these 57 documents on national security grounds and to protect sources and methods.

Although the released documents produced no smoking gun and revealed only a low-level Agency interest in the UFO phenomena after the Robertson panel report of 1953, the press treated the release in a sensational manner. The New York Times, for example, claimed that the declassified documents confirmed intensive government concern over UFOs and that the Agency was secretly involved in the surveillance of UFOs. GSW then sued for the release of the withheld documents, claiming that the Agency was still holding out key information. It was much like the John F. Kennedy assassination issue. No matter how much material the Agency released and no matter how dull and prosaic the information, people continued to believe in a Agency cover-up and conspiracy.

DCI Stansfield Turner was so upset when he read The New York Times article that he asked his senior officers, "Are we in UFOs?" After reviewing the records, Don Wortman, Deputy Director for Administration, reported to Turner that there was "no organized Agency effort to do research in connection with UFO phenomena nor has there been an organized effort to collect intelligence on UFOs since the 1950s." Wortman assured Turner that the Agency records held only "sporadic instances of correspondence dealing with the subject," including various kinds of reports of UFO sightings. There was no Agency program to collect actively information on UFOs, and the material released to GSW had few deletions. Thus assured, Turner had the General Counsel press for a summary judgment against the new lawsuit by GSW. In May 1980, the courts dismissed the lawsuit, finding that the Agency had conducted a thorough and adequate search in good faith.

During the late 1970s and 1980s, the Agency continued its low-key interest in UFOs and UFO sightings. While most scientists now dismissed flying saucers reports as a quaint part of the 1950s and 1960s, some in the Agency and in the Intelligence Community shifted their interest to studying parapsychology and psychic phenomena associated with UFO sightings. CIA officials also looked at the UFO problem to determine what UFO sightings might tell them about Soviet progress in rockets and missiles and reviewed its counterintelligence aspects. Agency analysts from the Life Science Division of OSI and OSWR officially devoted a small amount of their time to issues relating to UFOs. These included counterintelligence concerns that the Soviets and the KGB were using US citizens and Ufo groups to obtain information on sensitive US weapons development programs (such as the Stealth aircraft), the vulnerability of the US air-defense network to penetration by foreign missiles mimicking UFOs, and evidence of Soviet advanced technology associated with UFO sightings.

CIA also maintained Intelligence Community coordination with other agencies regarding their work in parapsychology, psychic phenomena, and "remote viewing" experiments. In general, the Agency took a conservative scientific view of these unconventional scientific issues. There was no formal or official UFO project within the Agency in the 1980s, and Agency officials purposely kept files on UFOs to a minimum to avoid creating records that might mislead the public if released.

The 1980s also produced renewed charges that the Agency was still withholding documents relating to the 1947 Roswell incident, in which a flying saucer supposedly crashed in New Mexico, and the surfacing of documents which purportedly revealed the existence of a top secret US research and development intelligence.
Like the JFK assassination conspiracy theories, the UFO issue probably will not go away soon, no matter what the Agency does or says.

NOTES


3. In September 1993 John Peterson, an acquaintance of Woolsey's, first approached the DCI with a package of heavily sanitized CIA material on UFOs released to UFOlogist Stanton T. Friedman. Peterson and Friedman wanted to know the reasons for the redactions. Woolsey agreed to look into the matter. See Richard J. Warshaw, Executive Assistant, note to author, 1 November 1994; Warshaw, note to John H. Wright, Information and Privacy Coordinator, 1 January 1994; and Wright, memorandum to Executive Secretary, 2 March 1994. (Except where noted, all citations to CIA records in this article are to the records collected for the 1994 Agency-wide search that are held by the Executive Assistant to the DCI).

4. See Hector Quintanilla, Jr., "The Investigation of UFOs," Vol. 10, No. 4, Studies in Intelligence (full 1966): pp.95-110 and CIA, unsigned memorandum, "Flying Saucers," 14 August 1952. See also Good, Above Top Secret, p. 253. During World War II, US pilots reported "foo fighters" (bright lights trailing US aircraft). Fearing they might be Japanese or German secret weapons, OSS investigated but could find no concrete evidence of enemy weapons and often filed such reports in the "crackpot" category. The OSS also investigated possible sightings of German V-1 and V-2 rockets before their operational use during the war. See Jacobs, UFO Controversy, p. 33. The Central Intelligence Group, the predecessor of the CIA, also monitored reports of "ghost rockets" in Sweden in 1946. See CIG, Intelligence Report, 9 April 1947.


11. See Dr. Stone, OSI, memorandum to Dr. Willard Machle, OSI, 15 March 1949 and Ralph L. Clark, Acting Assistant Director, OSI, memorandum for DDI, "Recent Sightings of Unexplained Objects," 29 July 1952.

12. Stone, memorandum to Machle. See also Clark, memorandum for DDI, 29 July 1952.

13. See Klass, UFOs, p. 15. For a brief review of the Washington sightings see Good, Above Top Secret, pp. 269-271.

14. See Ralph L. Clark, Acting Assistant Director, OSI, memorandum to DDI Robert Amory, Jr., 29 July 1952. OSI and OCI were in the Directorate of Intelligence. Established in 1948, OSI served as the CIA's focal point for the analysis of foreign scientific and technological developments. In 1980, OSI was merged into the Office of Science and Weapons Research. The Office of Current Intelligence (OCI), established on 15 January 1951 was to provide all-source current intelligence to the President and the National Security Council.

15. Taus, memorandum for Deputy Assistant Director, SI (Philip Strong), 1 August 1952.

16. On 2 January 1952, DCI Walter Bedell Smith created a Deputy Directorate for Intelligence (DDI) composed of six overt CIA organizations—OSI, OCI, Office of Collection and Dissemination, Office National Estimates, Office of Research and Reports, and the Office of Intelligence Coordination—to produce intelligence analysis for US policymakers.

17. See Minutes of Branch Chief's Meeting, 11 August 1952.

18. Smith expressed his opinions at a meeting in the DDI Conference Room attended by his top officers. See Deputy Chief, Requirements Staff, FI, memorandum for Deputy Director, Plans, "Flying Saucers," 20 August 1952, Directorate of Operations Records, Information Management Staff, Job 86-00538R, Box 1. (S)


24. See Chadwell, memorandum, 25 November 1952 and Chadwell, memorandum, "Approval in Principle - External Research Project Concerned with Unidentified Flying Objects," no date. See also Philip G. Strong, OSI, memorandum for the record, "Meeting with Dr. Julius A. Stratton, Executive Vice President and Provost, MIT and Dr. Max Millikan, Director of CERN." Strong believed that in order to undertake such a review they would need the full backing and support of DCI Smith.


26. The IAC was created in 1947 to serve as a coordinating body in establishing intelligence requirements. Chaired by the DCI, the IAC included representatives from the Department of State, the Army, the Air Force, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the FBI, and the AEC.

27. See Klass, UFOs, p. 27.

28. See Richard D. Draine, Acting Secretary, IAC, "Minutes of Meeting held in Director's Conference Room, Administration Building, CIA," 4 December 1952.

29. (S) See Chadwell, memorandum for the record, "British Activity in the Field of UFOs," 18 December 1952.


31. See Fred C. Durant III, Report on the Robertson Panel Meeting, January 1953. Durant, on contract with OSI and a past president of the American Rocket Society, attended the Robertson panel meetings and wrote a summary of the proceedings.


34. See Reber, memorandum to IAC, 18 February 1953.

35. See Chadwell, memorandum for DDI, "Unidentified Flying Objects,"


37. See Chadwell, memorandum for Chief, Physics and Electronics Division/OSI (Todos M. Odarenko), "Unidentified Flying Objects," 27 May 1953.

38. See Odarenko, memorandum to Chadwell, "Unidentified Flying Objects," 3 July 1953. See also Odarenko, memorandum to Chadwell, "Current Status of Unidentified Flying Objects (UF0B) Project," 17 December 1953.


41. Developed by the Canadian affiliate of Britain's A. V. Roe, Ltd., Project Y did produce a small-scale model that hovered a few feet off the ground. See Odarenko, memorandum to Chadwell, "Flying Saucer Type of Planes" 25 May 1954; Frederic C. E. Oder, memorandum to Odarenko, "USAF Project X," 21 May 1954; and Odarenko, T. M. Nordbeck, Ops/SI, and Sidney Graybeal, ASD/SI, memorandum for the record, "Intelligence Responsibilities for Non-Conventional Types of Air Vehicles," 14 June 1954.


45. See Pedlow and Welzenbach, Overhead Reconnaissance, pp. 72-73. This also was confirmed in a telephone interview between the author and John Parongosky, 26 July 1994. Parongosky oversaw the day-to-day affairs of the OXCART program.

46. See Jacobs, The UFO Controversy, p. 135.


48. See Strong, letter to Lloyd W. Berknor; Strong, letter to Thornton Page; Strong, letter to Robertson; Strong, letter to Samuel Gouldmit; Strong, letter to Luis Alvarez, 20 December 1957; and Strong, memorandum for Major James F. Byrne, Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence Department of the Air Force. "Declassification of the Report of the Scientific Panel on Unidentified Flying Objects," 20 December 1957. See also Berkner, letter to Strong, 20 November 1957 and Page, letter to Strong, 4 December 1957. The panel members were also reluctant to have their association with the Agency released.

49. See Wilton E. Lexow, memorandum for the record, "Comments on Letters Dealing with Unidentified Flying Objects," 4 April 1958; J. S. Earman, letter to Major Lawrence J. Tacker, Office of the Secretary of the Air Force, Information Service, 4 April 1958; Davidson, letter to Berkner, 8 April 1958; Berkner, letter to Davidson, 18 April 1958; Berkner, letter to Strong, 21 April 1958; Davidson, letter to Tacker, 27 April 1958; Davidson, letter to Allen Dulles, 27 April 1958; Ruppelt, letter to Davidson, 7 May 1958; Strong, letter to Berkner, 8 May 1958; Davidson, letter to Berkner, 8 May 1958; Davidson, letter to Tacker, 8 May 1958; and Davidson, letter to Page, 18 May 1958; and Tacker, letter to Davidson, 20 May 1958.

50. See Lexow, memorandum for Chapin, 28 July 1958.


52. See Edwin M. Ashcraft, Chief, Contact Division (Scientific), memo-
53. The Contact Division was created to collect foreign intelligence information from sources within the United States. See the Directorate of Intelligence Historical Series, The Origin and Development of Contact Division, 11 July 1946–1 July 1965 (Washington, D.C.: CIA Historical Staff, June 1969).

54. See George O. Forrest, Chief, Chicago Office, memorandum to Chief, Contact Division, 11 March 1955.

55. See Support Division (Connell), memorandum to Dewelt E. Walker, 25 April 1957.

56. See J. Arnold Shaw, Assistant to the Director, letter to Davidson, 10 May 1957.


58. See Lamountain, cable to Support (Connell), 31 July 1958.

59. See Support (Connell) cable to Skakich, 3 October 1957 and Skakich, cable to Connell, 9 October 1957.

60. See Skakich, cable to Connell, 9 October 1957.

61. See R. P. B. Lohmann, memorandum for Chief, Contact Division, DO, 9 January 1958.


63. See Edwin M. Ashcraft, Chief, Contact Division, Office of Operations, memorandum for Austin Bricker, Jr., Assistant to the Director, "Inquiry by Major Donald E. Keyhoe on John Hazen's Association with the Agency," 22 January 1959.

64. See John T. Hazen, memorandum to Chief, Contact Division, 12 December 1957. See also Ashcraft, memorandum to Cleveland Resident Agent, "Ralph E. Mayher," 20 December 1957. According to this memorandum, the photographs were viewed at "a high level and returned to us without comment." The Air Force held the original negatives. The CIA records were probably destroyed.

65. The issue would resurface in the 1970s with the GSW FOIA court case.

66. See Robert Amory, Jr., DDI, memorandum for Assistant Director/Scientific Intelligence, "Flying Saucers," 26 March 1956. See also Wallace R. Lamphere, Office of the Director, Planning and Coordination Staff, memorandum for Richard M. Bissell, Jr., "Unidentified Flying Saucers (UFO)," 11 June 1957; Philip Strong, memorandum for the Director, NPLC, "Reported Photography of Unidentified Flying Objects," 27 October 1958; Scoville, memorandum to Lawrence Houston, Legislative Counsel, "Reply to Honorable Joseph E. Garth," 12 July 1961; and Houston, letter to Garth, 13 July 1961.

67. See, for example, Davidson, letter to Congressman Joseph Garth, 26 June 1961 and Carl Vinson, Chairman, House Committee on Armed Services, letter to Rep. Robert A. Everett, 2 September 1964.


73. See John Lear, "The Disputed CIA Document on UFOs," Saturday Review (September 3, 1966), p. 45. The Lear article was otherwise unsympathetic to UFO sightings and the possibility that extraterrestrials were involved. The Air Force had been eager to provide Lear with the full report. See Walter L. Mackey, Executive Officer, memorandum for DCI, "Air Force Request to Declassify CIA Material on Unidentified Flying Objects (UFO)," 1 September 1966.


76. See Lundahl, memorandum for DDI, 7 February 1967.


78. See memorandum for the record, "UFO Briefing for Dr. Edward Condon, 5 May 1967," 8 May 1967 and attached "Guidelines to UFO Photographers and UFO Photographic Information Sheet." See also Condon Committee, Press Release, 1 May 1967 and Klass, UFOs, p. 41. The Zaneville photographs turned out to be a hoax.


80. See Office of Assistant Secretary of Defense, News Release, "Air Force to Terminate Project BLUEBOOK," 17 December 1969. The Air Force retired BLUEBOOK records to the USAF Archives at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama. In 1976 the Air Force turned over all BLUEBOOK files to the National Archives and Records Administration, which made them available to the public without major restrictions. Some names have been withheld from the documents. See Klass, UFOs, p. 6.

81. GSW was a small group of UFO buffs based in Phoenix, Arizona, and headed by William H. Spaulding.

82. See Klass, UFOs, p. 8.

83. See Wilson, letter to Spaulding, 26 March 1976 and GSW v. CIA Civil Action Case 78-859.

84. GSW v. CIA Civil Action Case 78-859, p. 2.

85. Author interview with Launie Zibeell, 23 June 1994 and author interview with OSI analyst, 21 July 1994. See also affidavits of George Owens, CIA Information and Privacy Act Coordinator; Karl H. Weber, OSI; Sidney D. Steenbridge, Office of Security; and Rutledge P. Hazzard, DSKT; GSW v. CIA Civil Action Case 78-859 and Sayre Stevens, Deputy Director for National Foreign Assessment, memorandum for Thomas H. White, Assistant for Information, Information Review Committee, "FOIA Litigation Ground Saucer Watch," no date.


89. See GSW v. CIA Civil Action 78-859. See also Klass, UFOs, pp. 10-12.

90. (S) See John Brennan, memorandum for Richard Warshaw, Executive Assistant, DCI, "Requested Information on UFOs," 30 September 1993. Author interviews with OSWR analyst, 14 June 1994 and OSI analyst, 21 July 1994. This author found almost no documentation on Agency involvement with UFOs in the 1980s.

There is a DIA Psychiatric Center and the NSA studies parapsychology, that branch of psychology that deals with the investigation of such psychic phenomena as clairvoyance, extrasensory perception, and telepathy. The CIA reportedly is also a member of an Incident Response Team to investigate UFO landings, if one should occur. This team has never met. The lack of solid CIA documentation on Agency UFO-related activities in the 1980s leaves the entire issue somewhat murky for this period.


Dr. Larry Bland, editor of The George C. Marshall Papers, discovered that one of the so-called Majestic-12 documents was a complete fraud. It contained the exact same language as a letter from Marshall to Presidential candidate Thomas Dewey regarding the "Magic" intercepts in 1944. The dates and names had been altered and "Magic" changed to "Majic." Moreover, it was a photocopy, not an original. No original MJ-12 documents have ever surfaced. Telephone conversation between the author and Bland, 29 August 1994.