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Recommendations of CIA-sponsored panel which convened briefly in 1953 effectively stopped the flow of UFO information to the public.

OFFICIAL POLICY on UFOs switched dramatically in 1953. After building its investigatory capacity in 1952, Project Blue Book by the end of 1953 could no longer adequately investigate or analyze UFO reports and functioned mainly as a public relations and collecting office. This change was due primarily to the recommendations of a group of scientists who formed the Robertson

the national security. It was possible for the Soviet Union, or any other "enemy," to use UFOs as a decoy in preparation for an attack on the United States. It was possible that a deliberately confused American public might think attacking enemy bombers were UFOs. At the least, a foreign power could exploit the flying saucer craze to make the public doubt official Air Force statements

A Pivotal Event in UFO History

THE GREAT CIA COVER-UP

By David Michael Jacobs

panel. The convening of this CIA-sponsored panel was a pivotal event in UFO history. Although much of the information concerning the impetus for the panel remains in CIA and Pentagon files and is therefore unavailable, sufficient information is accessible to reconstruct most of the events leading to the Air Force's policy reversal.

The CIA became interested in the UFO phenomenon during the 1952 wave of sightings. The CIA and some high-ranking Air Force officers, including Generals Vandenberg and Samford, thought the mass of UFO reports might constitute a threat to

about UFOs and thereby undermine public confidence in the military. Moreover, the volume of sighting reports in 1952 had clogged normal military intelligence channels and this certainly would pose a danger during an enemy attack.

With the information from the Battelle Memorial Institute's* statistical study, it would be possible to assess the dangers UFOs might represent. But the Battelle Memorial Institute was not ready to present its findings. At a preliminary meeting in early December 1952, Battelle representatives strongly recommended that the proposed CIA meeting be postponed until Battelle could make the results

*A private research organization commissioned in 1951 to study reported UFO characteristics.

THE GREAT CIA COVER-UP

Woo, and CIA personnel: Dr. H. Marshall Chadwell, Ralph L. Clark, and Philip G. Strong.

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

Ruppelt briefed the panel on Blue Book's methods of tracking down UFO reports. Hynek described the Battelle Memorial Institute study, which was still in progress. The panel discussed a few case histories and saw a special movie of sea gulls in flight that tried to duplicate the Newhouse film. It then heard a report on Project Twinkle, the Air Force's attempt to decipher the green fireball mystery. General Garland spoke, explaining that more intelligence efforts coupled with better briefings should be used to sort and collect UFO reports. He recommended declassifying reports completely on a continuing basis and increasing ATIC's UFO analysis section. Later, Hynek outlined a sky-watch program which might be an

inexpensive adjunct to current astronomical programs. Trained astronomers could photograph a UFO while doing other work through a program of this kind. Hynek suggested 10 different observatories where Blue Book could implement this plan.

On Friday morning Dewey Fournet read a paper on reported UFO movements, concluding that the extraterrestrial hypothesis might be the key to the mystery. Although impressed that Fournet had been with the UFO project for 15 months and was an aeronautical engineer, the panel members could not accept his interpretation of what they perceived as "raw, unevaluated reports." During the three days of examining Blue Book data, the panel reviewed eight cases in detail, 15 in general, and saw two movies. It discussed tentative conclusions and recommendations on Friday afternoon and commissioned Robertson to draft a final report. The members spent the next day correcting and altering the draft. The panel had spent a total of 12 hours studying the UFO phenomenon. The panel adjourned Saturday afternoon, January 17, ending the most influential government-sponsored, nonmilitary UFO investigation of the 1950's.

Probably because of time limitations and the small number of reports the panel members examined, they disregarded apparent anomalous evidence in certain UFO reports. For example, the Navy Photograph Interpretation Laboratory spent 1,000 hours analyzing the Newhouse film and concluded that the objects in the film were neither birds, balloons, aircraft nor reflections; rather, they were "self-luminous." The laboratory based its analysis on the assumption that Newhouse's distance estimates were accurate. Rejecting this analysis, the panel members reasoned that Newhouse probably was mistaken in his distance estimates.

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of its study available to the Air Technical Intelligence Center. Battelle's problem was that it was working with unreliable data and it could not document what it felt should be supported by facts from the analysis.

Since the need for precise data was important for identification, Battelle suggested that the Air Force set up controlled experiments in areas of high UFO activity. These areas could be stocked with sky-watch equipment (radar, cameras, measuring equipment, etc.). All conventional objects crossing the area would be known in advance. Therefore, any unidentified flying objects could be recognized at once by a simple process of elimination. Once Battelle had data from these controlled experiments, it would apply the information to past unidentified sightings and would lay the flying saucer controversy to rest once and for all. Furthermore, the Air Force would benefit from this experiment because it would then know just how much attention to pay to a massive wave of sightings like the one just passed. The Air Force could make positive statements reassuring the public that the military had everything under control.

But against Battelle's objections and mindful of the potential threat to national security, the CIA decided to go forward. It convened a distinguished panel of nonmilitary scientists to analyze the Blue Book data. Five outstanding scientists in the physical sciences, two associate panel members, and various Air Force and CIA representatives met from Wednesday, January 14, to Saturday, January 17, 1953, in Washington, D.C.

Dr. H. P. Robertson, formerly of Princeton and the California Institute of Technology and an expert in mathematics, cosmology, and relativity, chaired the panel. At that time he was director of the Weapons System Evaluation Group in the

Office of the Secretary of Defense and a CIA classified employee. Panel member Samuel A. Goudsmit, an associate of Einstein, discovered electron spin in 1925 in Holland, helped found a school of theoretical physics, and headed a mission at the end of World War II to investigate the Germans' progress in developing the atomic bomb. In 1953 he was on the physics staff of the Brookhaven National Laboratories. Luis Alvarez, a high-energy physicist, contributed to a microwave radar system and the atomic bomb and received the Nobel Prize for physics in 1968. Thornton Page, former professor of astronomy at the University of Chicago, was a physicist at the Naval Ordnance Laboratory during World War II and in 1953 was deputy director of the Johns Hopkins Operations Research Office. Lloyd Berkner, the final panel member, had accompanied Admiral Byrd on the 1928-30 Antarctic expedition, had been a physicist with the Carnegie Institution's Department of Terrestrial Magnetism, had headed the radar section of the Navy Bureau of Aeronautics, and had served as executive secretary of the Department of Defense's Research and Development Board in World War II. Later he became special assistant to the Secretary of State and at the time of the panel was one of the directors of the Brookhaven National Laboratories.

Two associate panel members were J. Allen Hynek and Frederic C. Durant. Hynek was invited only to selected meetings. Durant, an army ordnance test station director, past president of the American Rocket Society, and president of the International Astronautical Federation, wrote the summary of the proceedings. Also present were Edward Ruppelt, Dewey Fournet, ATIC chief Gen. W. M. Garland, Navy Photo Interpretation Laboratory representatives Lt. R. S. Neasham and Harry

As S. A. Goudsmit said, "By assuming that the distance was less, the results could be explained as due to a formation of ducks or other birds, reflecting the strong desert sunlight but being just too far and too luminous to see their shape. This assumption yielded reasonable speed and accelerations." The panel concurred in the bird explanation. The panel used similar reasoning to interpret the Mariana film. Mariana saw two jet planes about to land at a nearby air base just before his sighting. He testified, however, that he knew the difference between the planes and the objects. But because the jets and the two objects had appeared near the same place at about the same time, the panel decided Mariana was mistaken and had taken a film of the jets.

After reviewing the data, the panel found no evidence that UFOs represented a direct threat to the national security. The Air Force's concern over UFOs "was probably caused by public pressure," due to the number of articles and books on the subject. Nevertheless, the panel warned that "having a military source foster public concern in 'nocturnal meandering lights' was 'possibly dangerous.'" The implication was that military interest in the objects might encourage people to believe the objects were a potential threat to national security. The panel also concluded that the reports represented little, if any, valuable scientific data; the material was "quite irrelevant to hostile objects that might some day appear." Assuming that visitors would probably come from our solar system, Thornton Page noted that astronomical knowledge of the solar system made the existence of extraterrestrial intelligent beings extremely unlikely. Page also incorrectly assumed that UFO reports occurred only in the United States, and the idea that extraterrestrial

objects would visit only one country seemed "preposterous."

Even though the panel did not believe UFOs were a direct threat to the national security, it did find a potentially dangerous threat in the reports. The panel commented that "the continued emphasis on the reporting of these phenomena does, in these perilous times, result in a threat to the orderly functioning of the protective organs of the body politic." The reports clogged military intelligence channels, might precipitate mass hysteria, and might make defense personnel misidentify or ignore "actual enemy artifacts." In language reminiscent of Project Grudge's recommendations, the panel found that the reports could make the public vulnerable to "possible national psychology warfare" by cultivating a "morbid national psychology in which skillful hostile propaganda could induce hysterical behavior and harmful distrust of duly constituted authority." At last the military had found the threat to national security — the UFO reports, not the UFOs. The real enemy had finally been identified.

Based on its conclusions, the panel made four recommendations. The first concerned Blue Book's diffraction camera,* radarscope, and sky-watch plans. It suggested using the diffraction cameras not to collect UFO data but to allay public anxiety, especially because the plan was the result of public pressure. Similarly, it recommended implementation of the radarscope plan because it could help explain natural interference in the radar screens. But it rejected Dr. Hynek's expanded sky-watch plan. "A program of this type," the

*A camera suggested by UCLA physicist Joseph Kaplan which would analyze the color spectrum of any unidentified object it photographed for comparison with the spectrums of known objects, such as meteors and stars.

THE GREAT CIA COVER-UP

49

panel argued, "might have the adverse effect of overemphasizing 'flying saucer' stories in the public mind." In a second proposal the panel suggested that the two major private UFO research organizations, the Aerial Phenomena Research Organization and the Civilian Saucer Intelligence, "be watched because of their potentially great influence on mass thinking if widespread sightings should occur. The apparent irresponsibility and the possible use of such groups for subversive purposes should be kept in mind." Third, the members recommended that national security agencies take steps immediately to strip the UFO phenomenon of its special status and eliminate the aura of mystery it had acquired. This could be done by initiating a public education campaign so that people could recognize and react promptly to true indications of hostile intent.

Finally, in its fourth proposal, the Robertson panel outlined a detailed program of public education with two purposes: "training and 'debunking.'" Training would help people identify known objects so that there would be "a marked reduction in reports caused by misidentification and resultant confusion." Debunking would reduce public interest in UFOs and therefore decrease or eliminate UFO reports. The education program, by using the mass media, would concentrate on "actual case histories which had been puzzling at first but later explained. As with conjuring tricks, there is much less stimulation if the 'secret' is known." Such a program would reduce "the current gullibility of the public and consequently their susceptibility to clever hostile propaganda." The panel suggested that the government hire psychologists familiar with mass psychology as consultants; it named a few, including Hadley Cantril who had written a book on the

1938 *War of the Worlds* broadcast. The panel also recommended that the Air Force use an army training film company, Walt Disney Productions, and personalities such as Arthur Godfrey in this massive educational drive. In a key discussion before making recommendations, the panel members decided that a limited expansion of Blue Book's investigatory capacity was needed to increase the percentage of explained reports; this also was necessary to reinforce the proposed educational program.

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

THE GREAT CIA COVER-UP

51

of testing, however, it found that because of chemical decomposition the grids were slowly disintegrating and losing their light-separating ability. It decided to try to repair or substitute the grids but never did, finally abandoning the entire idea. After one full year of work, the Air Force allowed the diffraction camera plan to die, although the Videon cameras without grids remained in operation at the bases.

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

Ruppelt temporarily left Blue Book in February 1953 for a several-month assignment in Denver. Since his replacement never came, this left a staff lieutenant in charge. When Ruppelt returned he found that the Air Force had reassigned several members of his staff and had sent no replacements. Eventually the Blue Book staff dwindled to Ruppelt and two assistants. This was not in keeping with the panel's recommendation, as Ruppelt understood it, to expand Blue Book. According to Ruppelt, his superior officers gave him orders to build up Blue Book; yet every time

he tried to add personnel or expand in any way, the Air Force refused to concur. Ruppelt left Blue Book permanently in August 1953. As a reserve he had been reactivated for the Korean War; now that it had ended he accepted a position in private industry. No replacement came for him and he turned over his command to Airman First Class Max Futch. The fact that an airman commanded the project demonstrates the priority the Air Force placed on it.

Dewey Fournet left the Pentagon in the same year. These two departures meant that the last effective military support for the continued study of UFOs based on the premise that they could be extraterrestrial vehicles had vanished. Hynek still supported such study, but he was a civilian and could only submit suggestions. Moreover, although he believed the Air Force should study the subject systematically, he feared ridicule from the academic community if he came out strongly for a continued systematic investigation. Hynek simply kept quiet and continued in his role as consultant.

In August 1953, the Air Force, mindful of the previous year's hectic summer, moved to regularize and simplify its UFO investigating and reporting methods. First it issued Air Force Regulation 200-2 which superseded Air Force Letter 200-5. The regulation required an air base UFO officer to make a preliminary report of a sighting, and it spelled out exactly all the questions he was to ask of the UFO witnesses. The air base officer decided what priority to assign a report according to his determination of the report's intelligence value. The following year the Air Force amended AFR 200-2, stipulating that only the 4602d would make investigations. If a unit was not in the vicinity of a sighting, an air base officer was required to make a preliminary report and send

The Robertson report also had critically important public relations ramifications. It enabled the Air Force to state for the next 15 years that an impartial scientific body had examined the data thoroughly and found no evidence of anything unusual in the atmosphere. More importantly, the panel gave the Air Force's UFO program the necessary military *raison d'être* it needed to continue: it had to mount a major effort against UFO reports because they were a threat to the national security. The Air Force could now sidestep the substantive issues of the nature and origin of the objects and concentrate on the public relations problems involved in eliminating UFO reports. Blue Book was therefore relieved of its main investigating burden. Yet since the Air Force's overall mission was to monitor everything in the skies, Blue Book would still investigate and analyze UFO reports but on a greatly reduced scale.

The panel submitted its formal conclusions and recommendations to the CIA and, as far as can be ascertained, to the Pentagon and higher echelons of the Air Force. Robertson showed the final report to General Cabell (former director of intelligence), who expressed satisfaction with it. The CIA did not give a copy of the report to Ruppelt or his staff in 1953, although it did release a summary to Blue Book a few years later. But shortly after the panel adjourned, the CIA summoned Ruppelt and Garland to its headquarters to tell them about the recommendations. As Ruppelt reported it, the officials explained that the Robertson panel had recommended expanding Blue Book's staff, using instruments for more accurate measurements, and terminating all secrecy in the project by declassifying sighting reports. If Ruppelt understood and reported correctly, it remains a mys-

tery why the CIA gave out this false information. The panel members had recommended continued use of some plans in their discussions but had not made this the focus of their formal recommendations.

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

Other events happened at Project Blue Book that Ruppelt could not account for. Toward the end of 1952 the Air Force began to work out a nationwide plan to set up cameras in connection with radar units (this plan was different from the plan to take photographs of radarscopes). The cameras would photograph any UFO that radar picked up and would provide accurate measurements of the objects. The Air Force hoped this plan would either take the place of the diffraction grid camera plan or supplement it. Suddenly, and seemingly without reason, the Air Force abandoned it, saying the diffraction cameras would suffice. Even the radarscope plan, which the panel had suggested, was not producing valuable information. Thus, the diffraction camera scheme, which was ready for implementation, assumed even more importance. The Air Force placed about 100 Videcon cameras equipped with diffraction grids in air bases around the country and tested them. After a few weeks

it to the 4602d unit nearest him, which would determine if a field investigation was warranted. AFR 200-2 also took a firm public relations stance: it prohibited the release of *any* information about a sighting to the public except when the sighting was positively identified. In addition, while Air Force Letter 200-5 had stated that sightings should not be classified higher than restricted, the new regulation (200-2) said all sightings should be classified restricted at the very least. Finally, the regulation directed ATIC to continue analyzing UFO data as they came in from the 4602d units.

The new regulations gave the Air Force strong control over the sighting reports it received, and it hoped this control would mean increased identification of the objects. The prohibition against giving out sighting information reflected the Air Force's attempts to institute the Robertson panel's desire to end public speculation about UFOs with the concomitant threat of increased reports. For the first time the Air Force had institutionalized secrecy at the air base level. To further ward off publicity leaks, the Joint Chiefs of Staff followed up 200-2 with Joint Army-Navy-Air Force Publication (JANAP) 146 in December 1953. Under the subheading of "Canadian-United States Communications Instructions for Reporting Vital Intelligence Sightings" the Joint Chiefs of Staff made releasing any information to the public about a UFO report a crime under the Espionage Act, punishable by a one-to-10-year prison term or a \$10,000 fine. JANAP 146 applied to anyone who knew it existed, including commercial airline pilots. This action effectively stopped the flow of information to the public. Only if Blue Book could positively identify a sighting as a hoax or misidentification would the Air Force release information to the public. The

police was in effect until December 1969, when the Air Force terminated its involvement with UFOs.

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

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

Thus the Air Force's involvement with the UFO controversy changed

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

its work, it would never again be able to conduct a program of thorough investigations. From 1953 to 1969 Project Blue Book's main thrust was public relations. . . .

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

CAST THE FIRST STONE

By Frank Ball

FOR MANY years after John Wesley and his brother Samuel began preaching throughout England they were vigorously criticized by the Church of England for their heretical ideas. Encouraged by local pastors, mobs often attacked the brothers while civil authorities looked on apathetically.

On a hot day in August 1748 John Wesley was preaching at the base of a cross that stood on the village green in Bolton, Lancashire, when a crowd gathered, bent on persecuting the preacher. Some of the ruffians carried

John was pretty well along in his discourse when three ruffians stole up behind him—just as three of their fellows let stones fly from the crowd. One stone struck the first ruffian on the arm and spun him around as he reached for Wesley. The second stone struck the second ruffian on the head stunning him. The last stone struck the third heckler full in the temple as he was shouting in Wesley's ear. Wesley was unharmed. Impressed by this seeming miracle the crowd became quiet and listened attentively throughout the rest of the sermon.