

# THE "MEN IN BLACK" REPORTS

Should they be taken seriously?

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Our contributor is Editor of the *Merseyside UFO Bulletin*, an independent journal which, until recently, was produced for the sole purpose of exchange.\* In this excellent endeavour he is assisted by Alan W. Sharp and John A. Rimmer. This article has been adapted from a longer item which appeared in the September 1968 issue of MUFOB.

PEOPLE who witness UFOs and those who attempt to investigate their reports often report strange experiences which appear to have some connection with the UFO mystery. This article is mainly concerned with one aspect of the problem, which is at present being much discussed among ufologists, that is the stories of witnesses or investigators who claim to have been threatened or warned to keep silent about their sightings and/or theories by mysterious visitors and telephone callers. The main questions to be dealt with are:

1. How serious is the problem?
2. What are the best methods of attempting to discover the cause of such reports?

## The two main attitudes to the problem

These may be briefly stated thus:

(a) Genuine reports of witnesses being silenced, having photographs confiscated, etc., are due to the activities of government security agencies or individuals posing, for some unknown reason, as government agents. All other such reports are hoaxes or delusions.

(b) Some of the reports are genuine, but theories about government agents or people impersonating them are inadequate to account for important details given in the reports. The exact nature and purpose of such incidents remain a mystery.

## Brief history of MIB reports

The first report of the "Men in Black" (MIB) variety in the post-war phase of UFO activity is generally agreed to have been contained in statements made by

Harold A. Dahl to Kenneth Arnold during the latter's investigation of the alleged Maury Island sighting of June 21, 1947.<sup>1</sup> According to Dahl, the day after his sighting a man called at his home early in the morning and invited him to breakfast. Dahl said that he was not surprised at this, for men often called on people in his type of work early in the morning for the purpose of buying salvaged logs. The man wore a *black suit*, was of *medium height*, and there was nothing unusual about his appearance. *He appeared to be about forty years of age*. Dahl accepted his invitation and noted that the man drove a 1947 *Buick Sedan*. The man suggested that Dahl should drive his own car and follow him. On the way downtown Dahl *failed to get the licence number* of the car he was following. The two men went to a cafe and ordered breakfast. As soon as they sat down the man immediately began telling Dahl, in minute and accurate detail, the events of the previous day when he and others had witnessed the UFOs. The man then told Dahl that *if he loved his family and didn't want anything to happen to his general welfare, he would not discuss his experience with anyone*.

The items italicized in the above account refer to details which recur again and again in more recent MIB reports. The Maury Island case, which is much too involved and complicated to summarize here, is still argued over today, but the U.S. Air Force claims that it was a hoax, devised by Harold Dahl and his colleague, Fred L. Crisman. Ruppelt has described it as "the dirtiest hoax in the UFO history."<sup>2</sup>

Dahl and Crisman are said to have confessed to the Air Force investigators.

The fullest account of the Maury Island affair is given in *The Coming of the Saucers*, by Kenneth Arnold and Ray Palmer. If any open-minded person reads Arnold's account carefully, he will find it very difficult to believe that Crisman and Dahl were able to arrange all the mysterious incidents described by him. Hoax or not, the whole story contains elements which crop up again and again in later incidents, quite apart from the MIB incident described.

The classic MIB case is that involving Albert K. Bender, who closed down his organisation, the International Flying Saucer Bureau, on the orders of "three men in black". The story circulating at the time was to the effect that Bender was studying his collection of UFO data when the solution to the mystery suddenly occurred to him. The MIB visited him, assured him that his guess was correct and warned him not to divulge the secret to anyone else. Bender refused to give reasons for closing the IFSB, but hinted that a government agency was responsible. Bender's case, along with other stories of a similar nature, received great publicity in the UFO world, and Gray Barker wrote a book on this theme.<sup>3</sup>

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In 1963, Bender published his own account of the affair.<sup>4</sup> Far from clearing up the mystery, Bender's story only served to create more confusion, for in it he claimed that the MIB were beings from another planet who were visiting the Earth at that time for the purpose of extracting a substance from sea water to take back to their own planet for use as food. Anyone who discovered too much about their activities was silenced, in order that the aliens could work undisturbed.

Naturally, even the most eager UFO believers found the story unconvincing, and it seems to have been generally assumed that Bender had—possibly through overwork—become the victim of an elaborate delusion, a delusion made worse by his interest in horror stories and occultism.

However, stories of witnesses and investigators being "silenced", either by sinister, black-garbed figures or, more convincingly, by ordinary-looking men who purported to be government officials persisted through the years until the vast increase in UFO reports since about 1964 brought with it some quite convincing reports of attempts to intimidate witnesses.

At the present time controversy rages concerning the findings of John Keel, who claims that the MIB are very real and very active. Keel has published a number of articles on the subject<sup>5</sup> and reports which tend to support his claims are available from other sources.<sup>6</sup>

#### **A local appeal for information**

In the July/August issue of our Bulletin we appealed for unpublished information concerning reports of visits by the MIB and other odd experiences in connection with UFO sightings and events. This appeal for information was published in the Liverpool *Echo*<sup>7</sup> and broadcast on BBC Radio Merseyside. Only three letters were received in response and these were merely requests for information.

However, the possibility that some victims of such experiences may be deluded was mentioned in the *Echo* and in the radio interview. Nobody likes to think that he is subject to delusions, so to begin with we are at once faced with an obstacle to any serious enquiry into

this matter. An obvious question is: Why did we receive no local reports of the MIB or suchlike, in view of the adequate publicity given to the appeal? Possible answers are:

1. Because there were no such experiences to report.

2. There were such incidents but the victims did not report them (a) because they did not want to be thought of as being deluded, or because they were afraid of possible damaging or undesirable publicity, or (b) because the MIB would not let them!

Needless to say, the first alternative is likely to prove to be the most popular explanation, but it must be pointed out that the technique used locally is very unlikely to be successful, whichever of the alternative answers given above happens to be the truth. The approach favoured by John Keel, that of personally interviewing many UFO witnesses, listening sympathetically to them and gaining their confidence, seems more likely to pay dividends.

#### **Different aspects of the problem in the U.S.A.**

Although stories about the harassment of UFO witnesses and investigators have come from various countries ever since 1947, they have been particularly persistent in the U.S.A. Such stories often sounded very convincing. Witnesses claimed to have been visited by men purporting to be FBI agents, or dressed in Air Force uniform. These men confiscated UFO photographs and warned witnesses to keep quiet about their sightings. Naturally, many of the UFO groups took these reports seriously and complained bitterly to the Air Force.

In January, 1967, however, ufologists got quite a shock when Colonel George Freeman, the Pentagon spokesman for Project Blue Book, revealed that the U.S. Air Force was just as annoyed about the mystery men as the ufologists were.<sup>8</sup> Colonel Freeman cited several cases. A man bearing credentials from the North American Air Defence saw Mr. Rex Heflin, who had taken a series of UFO pictures in California in 1965, and demanded the originals. The photographs were never returned and NORAD denied any knowledge

of the incident. In February, 1960, Mr. Joe Perry, of Grand Blanc, Michigan, took a similar set of pictures and was visited by two men posing as FBI agents who confiscated his photographs. Colonel Freeman denied that these incidents were connected with the Air Force UFO investigation and was quoted as saying: "We haven't been able to find out anything about these men. We would sure like to catch one."

On the other hand, investigators have recently brought to light many incidents of a more unlikely character. These include stories of visits from mysterious "men in black", who are said to drive about in black cars which are very old models but are nevertheless said to look brand new. These cars either have false licence plates or none at all, yet are completely successful in evading the police. The MIB are also said to drive up to witnesses' homes at night and take flash pictures of their houses with the aid of cumbersome - looking cameras mounted on tripods. In other words, most of the reported actions of the MIB appear to be completely nonsensical.

One of the contributing factors to the present confusion about this problem is the very conservative approach to the UFO mystery by many of the more influential American enthusiasts. Such a statement will seem incredible to anyone with little knowledge of the subject, but it is this conservatism which has probably led to the loss of many interesting reports and has succeeded in distorting the true picture of the world-wide UFO mystery through the years.

Published accounts of the work of Project Blue Book have made it plain that reports of UFO occupants were either thrown into the nearest wastepaper basket or placed in a file marked "C.P." (Crackpot). The more serious UFO organisations tended to adopt a somewhat similar policy with the result that the more bizarre aspects of the mystery were for long neglected or left to groups which were notorious for their lack of competence and objectivity. However, it seems that the situation has recently improved, although one suspects that the amount of weight which investiga-



tors give to each report depends overmuch on how far the report fits in with their theories. It appears that some ufologists, many of them comparatively new to the subject, have now almost completely discarded the popular approach of collecting data to support a particular theory (e.g. UFOs are spaceships from other planets; UFOs are occult phenomena; otherwise inexplicable UFO reports are hoaxes and delusions, etc.). The present fashion seems to be a recognition of the fact that the UFO phenomena are extremely complex and have apparently endless ramifications.

#### How serious is the problem?

Critics will say that in embarking on this article I have fallen into the trap of being side-tracked from the main UFO problem by apparently giving credence to reports which are merely the results of hoaxes, paranoid delusions, exaggerations and plain lies. It is true that the problem of assessing the reliability of the reports is a formidable one,

in view of the lack of physical evidence and the unpredictability of the reported phenomena. In the field of psychical research, Hansell<sup>10</sup> has described in detail how highly intelligent people, with scientific training and experience, can be fooled by faulty memory, cheating and trickery in experiments, wishful thinking and other factors which make psychic experiences and experiments seem more impressive than they really are. As many of the alleged MIB experiences seem to involve phenomena of the kind familiar to psychic researchers, Hansell's criticisms could no doubt profitably be borne in mind when investigating such reports.

Whatever the cause of MIB and similar reports, they should be studied seriously along with all the other phenomena associated with UFOs.

#### How should the problem be tackled?

The reports by John Keel concerning the MIB and other strange occurrences have attracted a good deal of criticism and, in some

quarters, amusement. FLYING SAUCER REVIEW reports that there is said to be a group of scientists interested in UFOs who burst into fits of uncontrollable laughter whenever they see a John Keel document. It also seems that some of the criticisms have been couched in terms more appropriate to the wilder extremes of politics than to scientific enquiry. There is only one way to deal with the startling claims of John Keel and others who have written in similar vein and the Editor of FLYING SAUCER REVIEW has summed it up neatly thus:

"If chair-borne critics, writers, UFO-buffs or laughing scientists are urged to say Mr. Keel is wrong, then it is incumbent upon them to get out and about and to thoroughly investigate his claims. If they do not do this they will find themselves on insecure ground."<sup>11</sup>

When enquiring into such reports it should of course be realised that some of them can be quite easily explained. On the one hand, there are people who become mentally ill  
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