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UFOs? Government Officials Didn't Always Scoff

By JOEY LEDFORD

Declassified government documents on UFOs — including accounts of sightings in Virginia and elsewhere in the South — indicate that despite the Air Force's public statements, officials took some of the reports seriously.

The Fund for UFO Research, a Mount Rainier, Md., group, has been filing Freedom Of Information petitions for years to amass 400 pages of once classified FBI, CIA, National Security Agency and Air Force documents on unidentified flying objects.

The Air Force officially closed the book on UFOs in 1969 when it discontinued Project Blue Book, which investigated 12,618 reported UFO sightings from 1948-69.

Air Force spokesman Lt. George Jamison said 701 sightings were never explained.

"Of those sightings investigated, 11,917 were found to have been caused by material objects, immaterial objects or astronomical objects," Jamison said.

"Some were found to have been weather conditions and some were found to be hoaxes," he said.

The decision to terminate Project Blue

Book was based on a two-year, \$539,740 study conducted by the University of Colorado that concluded in 1968 that UFOs usually were balloons, birds, planets, planes, stars, optical illusions, radar quirks and other natural phenomena.

The study, headed by Edward Condon, was criticized by some scientists for rejecting the possibility that some UFOs were space ships piloted by extraterrestrial beings.

"No UFO has ever given any indication of threat to our national security," said Jamison. "There has been no evidence submitted to or discovered by the Air Force that sightings categorized as unidentified represent technological developments or principles beyond present day scientific knowledge.

"There's been no evidence indicating the sightings categorized as unidentified were extraterrestrial vehicles," he said.

That's the public line.

But here's what a classified National Security Agency report in 1968 said about UFOs:

"The fact that UFO phenomena have

been witnessed all over the world . . . by considerable numbers of reputable scientists in recent times, indicates rather strongly that UFOs are not all hoaxes.

"If UFOs, contrary to all indications and expectations, are indeed hoaxes — hoaxes of a world-wide dimension — hoaxes of increasing frequency, then a human mental aberration of alarming proportions would appear to be developing."

The report said the theory that UFOs "are related to extraterrestrial intelligence cannot be disregarded."

The documents detail some fascinating encounters with UFOs as late as 1980. Most of the sightings detailed from the South, however, were among the earliest recorded. The names of the people making the reports were usually deleted by government censors.

UFO sightings began occurring in 1947. In 1949, an Oak Ridge, Tenn., man taking pictures of his family in his front yard saw "a ball of fire" and took a picture of it. The picture later ran in the Knoxville News-Sentinel. The FBI compiled a detailed report on the incident.

An FBI teletype marked "urgent" details a sighting of "four disc-shaped objects" near the Atomic Energy Commission's Savannah River Plant near Ellington, S.C., in May 1952.

Four employees filed the report, saying they saw "these objects . . . traveling at a high rate of speed at high altitude without any noise." However, one of the discs "was traveling at an altitude so low it had to rise to pass over some tall tanks."

An employee of the National Security Agency reported seeing a UFO near Henderson, N.C., early on the morning of April 12, 1956.

The woman was driving on a rural road with her fiance "when the pair was startled by what appeared to be a round low-flying object coming directly towards the car."

The round, spinning, bright aircraft, "containing lights in a zig-zag pattern" speeded up and veered out of sight. The woman was described by a high NSA official as "one of our best employees."

A CIA report told of the sighting of a "red

flare" traveling 750 to 1,000 mph near Cape Canaveral, Fla., on Dec. 10, 1956, seconds after a missile had been launched.

"The flare made a wide turn to the east immediately after the missile passed," it said the report. The Air Force told that it had ruled out aircraft or weather balloons as possible explanations.

Other reports are less believable.

An FBI report in 1967 said a television repairman in Chesapeake, Va., claimed to have been taken inside a UFO manhole by "several individuals who appeared to be under-sized creatures . . . probably not more than four feet tall."

The man told the FBI he was freed about an hour later. The report said the man "spoke in a coherent manner, although he appeared to be under emotional strain."

"This isn't what we're saying about UFOs, this is what the government is saying," said Fred Whiting, a spokesman for the Fund for UFO Research. "This isn't our stuff, it's theirs."

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