

'Urge to Investigate and Believe' Sparks New Interest in U.F.O.'s

By WILLIAM J. BROAD

THE ALIENS are here again, at least in terms of popular culture, if not fact.

Three books about alien visits are selling briskly; one of them has topped the nonfiction best seller list for weeks. Clubs, newsletters, movies, and lectures about unidentified flying objects are generating revenues at a pace exceeded only in the 1950's, during the first wave of U.F.O. sightings.

Enthusiasts are now even charging that for 46 years the Federal Government has harbored evidence of an encounter with extraterrestrial creatures, including their lifeless bodies and damaged spacecraft. That startling report, dismissed by skeptics and Government officials as laughable, is contained in what purport to be top-secret Government papers from the Eisenhower era.

Why the fascination with aliens, despite repeated failures over the decades to document their appearance?

In interviews, psychologists, historians, philosophers and writers of science fiction said belief in alien encounters was rooted in such things as the need for secular messiahs and the search for explanations for terrestrial troubles.

"The urge to investigate and believe in this stuff is almost religious," said Ben Bova, former editor of *Omni* magazine and a writer of science fiction. "We used to have gods. Now we want to feel we're not alone, watched over by protective forces."

But others, often sober, respectable scientists, said the skeptics were missing the biggest story of the age.

"People who haven't been paying attention to this stuff are in for a shock," said Dr. Bruce Maccabee, a full-time Navy physicist in Washington, D.C., and a part-time U.F.O. researcher. "Some sort of things have been flying around for decades, and they aren't ours."

The current U.F.O. flurry is led by new books: "Communion" by Whitney Strieber (Morrow), "Intruders" by Budd Hopkins (Random House), and "Light Years" by Gary Kinder (Atlantic Monthly Press). "Communion" has been on *The New York Times* best seller list for 16 weeks.

All three tell of personal encounters with aliens. In this they differ from the last great period of U.F.O. enthusiasm, in the 1950's, said David M. Jacobs, author of "The U.F.O. Controversy in America" and a historian at Temple University in Philadelphia. In the 1950's U.F.O. sightings were in vogue. Now, he said, we are in a "new era" in which aliens are taken as fact and attention had turned to "people's experiences" with them.

Indeed, the hottest topic among U.F.O. enthusiasts is what they describe as the Federal Government's experience with aliens, especially the "Roswell Incident," one of the oldest U.F.O. episodes on the books. Timothy Good, a British U.F.O. researcher, and a group of U.F.O. investigators in the United States say they have documentary evidence that the Government hid its knowledge that a "flying saucer" crashed in 1947 near Roswell, N. M., killing its crew of extraterrestrial creatures. The charges are contained in Mr. Good's book "Above Top Secret: The Worldwide U.F.O. Cover-Up," to be published in Britain in July.

The Government's position is that the 1947 incident was nothing more than the sighting of a weather balloon. But the U.F.O. researchers cite a newly discovered document, dated Nov. 18, 1952, purportedly a top-secret

Experts say belief is rooted in part in the need to explain earthly problems.

briefing paper for President-elect Dwight D. Eisenhower. It discusses a secret Federal team known as Majestic-12, or MJ-12, established by President Truman on Sept. 24, 1947 to investigate the of the spacecraft and its crew.

"It appears to be genuine," said William L. Moore, who wrote a book about the incident and who investigated the document for more than two years after a colleague received it anonymously in the mail. But he said there is nothing in the records "that shows it's a fraud."

"Nonsense," replied Philip J. Klass, a leading U.F.O. debunker and chairman of the U.F.O. subcommittee of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, a respected group of scientists. Mr. Klass said he had seen the document and considered it "an outright hoax."

The document purportedly recounts a secret briefing to President-elect Eisenhower by Rear Adm. Roscoe H. Hillenkoetter, the first director of the Central Intelligence Agency, who is now dead. According to the document, Admiral Hillenkoetter was a member of Majestic-12. It begins with a chronology of crash near Roswell.

"On 07 July, 1947," it says, "a secret operation was begun to assure recovery of the wreckage of this object for scientific study. During the

course of this operation, aerial reconnaissance discovered that four small human-like beings had apparently ejected from the craft at some point before it exploded. These had fallen to earth about two miles east of the wreckage site. All four were dead and badly decomposed due to action by predators and exposure to the elements during the approximately one week time period which had elapsed before their discovery."

"A special scientific team took charge of removing these bodies for study. The wreckage of the craft was also removed to several different locations. Civilian and military witnesses in the area were debriefed, and news reporters were given the effective cover story that the object had been a misguided weather research balloon."

By November 1947, the briefing continued, a Federal team of scientists had concluded "that although these creatures are human-like in appearance, the biological and evolutionary processes responsible for their development has been quite different from those observed or postulated in homo-sapiens."

Stanton J. Friedman, a nuclear physicist in Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada, who is investigating the document with Mr. Moore and who lectures widely on U.F.O.'s, acknowledged that interest it generated would raise lecture fees but said their goal was to get at the truth.

"We're dealing with something of extraordinary importance," he said. "What this means is that we humans are not the big shots we think we are." He said the landing was concealed because "no Government wants people to have their allegiance to the planet rather than themselves."

Reflecting on the scope and intensity of the current flurry of interest, Jerome Clark, vice president of the J. Allen Hynek Center for U.F.O. Studies in Chicago and editor of "International U.F.O. Reporter," said: "What's interesting is that all this is happening in the absence of a sighting wave. There hasn't really been anything sighted since the 1970's. If I were paranoid, I'd say it's quiet, too quiet."

Frederik Pohl, a science fiction writer, said belief in U.F.O.'s is flourishing now because the nation's political leaders are seen as floundering. "We're told by our leadership to be resolute against terrorism, yet they make deals," he said. "We're told 'Star Wars' is the future, but no one other than Ronald Reagan believes it. People have lost trust in reality and

they're looking for something else."

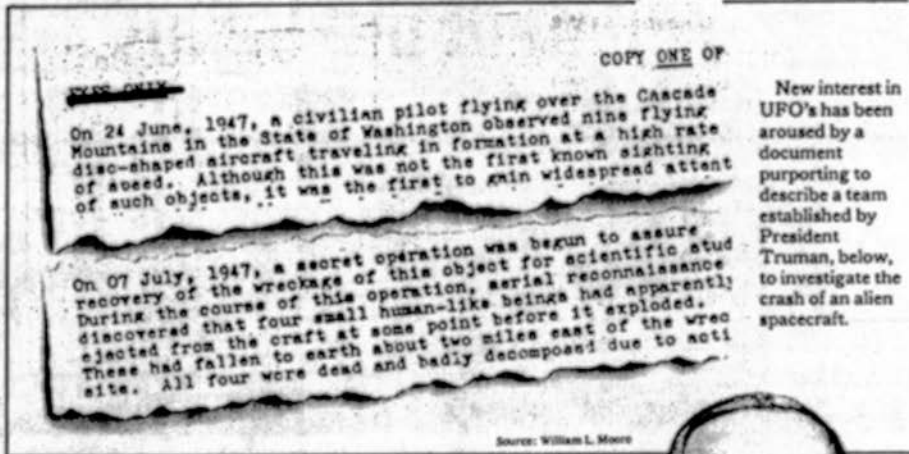
Michael Wertheimer, a psychologist at the University of Colorado who has participated in studies that debunked U.F.O. reports, agreed that feelings of helplessness tended to reinforce the urge to believe in the extraterrestrial. "The less people feel in control of their own fate, the more they look to occult or extranatural phenomena," he said.

The intensified interest in U.F.O.'s also reflects increased credulity in general, experts say.

Paul Kurtz, a philosopher at the State University of New York at Buffalo and chairman of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, said the current U.F.O. wave was "part of a bizarre trend in which there is no sense of standards of evidence. So much of this U.F.O. stuff has been discredited. This rash of belief throws all judgment to the wind."

Dr. Maccabee, the Navy physicist, conceded that skeptics often made valid points. "But the simple fact is that there are unexplained sightings," he added. "Over the past 40 years there have been 100,000 sightings, with 10 to 20 percent that are hard to explain."

In the case of the purported Eisenhower documents, he said, "maybe somebody's been clever, but I think there's a good chance they are authentic."



Source: William L. Moore



New interest in UFO's has been aroused by a document purporting to describe a team established by President Truman, below, to investigate the crash of an alien spacecraft.