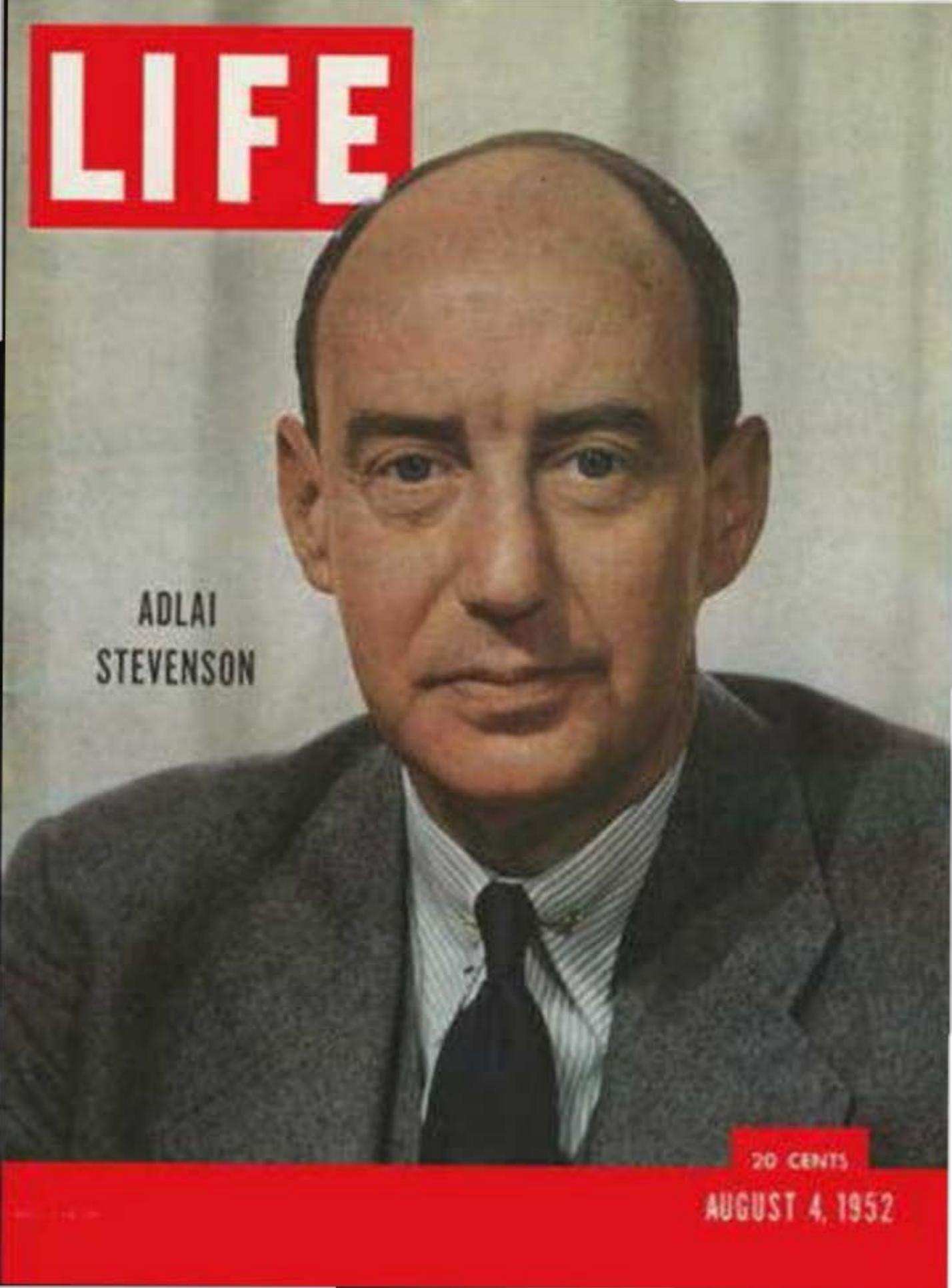


# LIFE



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**SAUCER PLOTTER** Harry Barnes, the chief of radar at Washington's CAA control center, works over the radar scope which just picked up strange blips.

## WASHINGTON'S BLIPS

'Somethings' over the capital are traced on radar

THE most startling "flying saucer" incidents recently reported have taken place during the past two weeks over Washington, D.C. and threaten to make politics take a back seat in the most political of American cities. There, for the first time, mysterious objects in the sky were recorded by ground observers, by pilots in airplanes and on radar screens all at the same time. And, for the first known time, the U.S. Air Force sent its jet planes up in an attempt to intercept the objects.

The incidents began on Sunday, July 20.

At 12:40 a.m. the radar operator at the CAA traffic control center in Washington was going quietly about his task of directing the traffic of commercial planes in his area, which appeared on his radar screen as little moving "blips" of light. Suddenly, several strange "blips" appeared denoting the presence of something in the sky 15 miles southwest of the city. As he looked at them they disappeared, then popped up over northeast Washington. Startled, he called Harry Barnes, senior controller of the radar room.

In a few minutes everyone in the radar room was gathered around the scope. The unidentified blips were bounding all over and performing most remarkably. Some seemed to hover idly, some reversed themselves back and forth, others sped along making right and left 90° turns. When they appeared to zoom over such targets as the Pentagon and the White House, Barnes became seriously alarmed. He sent two expert technicians to see if the intricate electronic gear was out of order. It wasn't. Next he called the control towers of the National Airport and Andrews Field, an Air Force base just outside Washington. He was hoping that their observers might actually see objects which he, in his windowless room deep inside the building, could detect only on radar.

An observer at Andrews Field went outside to look at the sky and saw a bright orange light. At the same time, a mechanic on an airstrip, who knew nothing of what was going on, called in to report that he had seen the same strange object. During the night the National Airport tower radar and the Andrews Field radar had recorded an object at this same place. There it was, a something fixed on three different radar scopes and confirmed by two eyewitnesses.

Barnes immediately called the Air Defense Command. Hoping for the arrival of jet fighters at any minute, Barnes went back to his radar. The blips were still there, so he radioed a commercial plane which was just taking off from the National Airport, and asked its pilot, C.S. Pierman, if he would change his course to

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

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## WASHINGTON'S BLIPS CONTINUED

intercept a target that Barnes could see on the radar. Pierman agreed. In the confusion which followed it is not clear whether Pierman saw exactly the same objects that Barnes was tracking on his radar, but the pilots did see six strange lights, white and star-like, speeding across the heavens. Conceivably, three could have been shooting stars or meteors for they fell at a slight angle, but the next three which were observed shot horizontally across the skies. These were tailless and seemed slower than meteors.

Although Barnes had estimated that some of the objects dawdled along as slowly as 130 mph, others went so fast that his radar could not track them. However, the radars at the airport towers, apparently capable of tracking faster-moving bodies, were able to fix on one object long enough to show that it had traveled eight miles in four seconds, which meant that its speed was 7,200 mph.

It was not until 3:00 a.m., two hours after Barnes's call, that radar-equipped jet fighters roared in from their Delaware base and called Barnes by radio. They reported that they saw nothing. Barnes agreed that there were no unidentified targets on his scope at the moment. The planes, low on fuel, returned to base. Shortly afterwards the blips were erupting all over the radar scope again.

One appeared next to the regular blip of Capital Airlines Flight 610, coming in from the south. Barnes called Pilot Howard Dermott and told him to look out of his window. Dermott did so and saw a large white light above the horizon in the same position that both radar sets at the airport had it. Barnes tracked plane and light toward the airfield until, four miles out, the light vanished.

On into the night the ghostly demonstration proceeded. Usually the unknown objects darted over the scope at random, but when an airliner appeared in the area the blips turned up around it. Just before daybreak Barnes wearily observed 10 of the objects at one time, then as commercial air traffic grew heavy, the shaken chief and his cohorts were forced to give up the eerie vigil.

### Blips again

**T**HEN, the following Saturday night, the blips began all over again. At 9:08 they appeared on the CAA radar screens where the others had been noticed almost a week before. There were five or six of them moving in a southerly direction. Harry Barnes again called both airport traffic tower and Andrews Field to see if their radar showed the blips. They did.

After tracking the blips for a half hour, Barnes began radioing airliners. United Airlines Flight 640 radioed: "I see a very dim light." Barnes radioed back: "You are now where three blips are." "One's here," radioed 640. "We got him in sight. He's real pretty." At that instant, Andrews reported to Barnes that they had seen three strange lights streaking across the sky.

More planes reported lights. Some others did not. At 10:44 a CAA patrol plane, the NC-12, radioed that he saw a cluster of them over Beltsville, Md., just where Barnes's radar reported them—"lights that are white and sometimes yellowish. They seem to change in intensity. Now there goes one, falling fast." A few minutes later, the NC-12 reported a group of five lights at 2,200 altitude. Suddenly all blips disappeared from the screen.

Soon they were back. Barnes had already notified the Pentagon Command Post, the high brass in Washington and the Air Defense Command. From their Delaware base, F-94 jet interceptors again barreled down toward Washington. They arrived at 11:25 and howled over the city. What happened then is in dispute. Officials in the radar room firmly state that a pilot reported contact at 11:25 with four lights 10 miles away and 500 feet above him. He closed at full throttle for two minutes, but the lights disappeared at tremendous speed. Another contact was made a few minutes later and was similarly broken off. Other planes made no contacts although there were blips on the radar screen while the planes were in the area. But when questioned by LIFE the pilots themselves denied any certain visual contacts with aerial lights or objects.

The attitude of the Air Force during the July incidents was puzzling. When the first appearance of the blips was reported in Washington newspapers, no mention was made of jet interceptors. In fact the Air Force stated that it had sent none up. But when confronted with the facts by TIME-LIFE Washington Correspondent Clay Blair Jr. who gathered the material for this article the Air Force finally admitted that it had indeed sent fighters up. No reason has been given for this contradiction. The Air Force might have been embarrassed by the delay in supplying planes. Or it might possibly have known more about the blips than it had admitted. There is another puzzle: experienced airline pilots could see lights where the radar reported blips. Air Force planes said they could not.