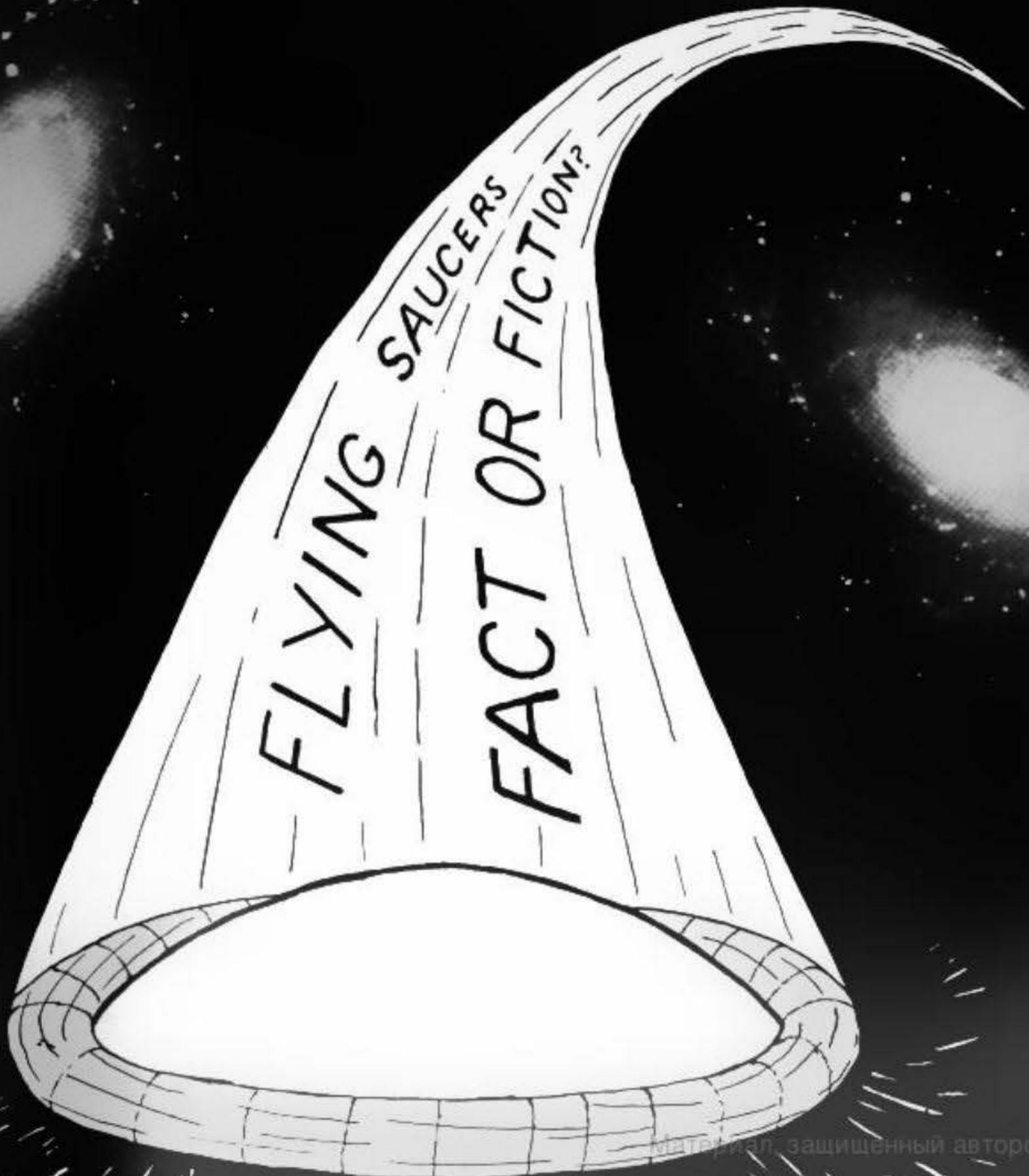




MICHIGAN TECHNIC

January, 1960



DO YOU BELIEVE IN

FLYING SAUCERS?

If you think this an amusing question, and are about to reply with a hasty "No," think for a few minutes and perhaps your decision will not be so quick and simple. Are we not on the threshold of space, rapidly learning how to move outward from our planet? In ten years or less, man on earth has changed from thinking in terms of the confines of the earth to thinking in terms of the solar system and the stars beyond. Much has been discovered, experiments have placed satellites in orbit, and research is rushing forward to put man in space.

Science has proved that life and civilization are relatively new on the earth. The earth is estimated as 11 billion years old and life can be traced to beginnings only 1 million years ago. Assuming that there is the possibility of life elsewhere in the universe, what has occurred on planets in other solar systems, planets older than the earth, on which life may have existed many centuries longer? At some point in their civilization, did they not reach out and learn the answers to the problems of space travel? As we expect to eventually conquer the complexities and difficulties of navigating beyond our atmosphere, could not some older, more advanced form of life have invented a vehicle that successfully overcame the problems of time, distance, radiation, and others that we have not as yet solved? Then, too, is it not possible that this form of life may differ from man, having evolved in a different environment? Therefore, this life might be more suitable for space travel than man. Could not a race, similar to ours but existing for many more years, have evolved a more intelligent being than man, as he is today on earth? Concerned with his earthly problems of living, warring, and acquiring control of his earthly environment, man has yet to turn his talents to that which is outside his planet. Only by a competitive need to remain strong and thus be protected, has man begun a race into space. Might not other beings in other worlds have been quicker in turning their thoughts to the universe? As one ponders such ideas, the existence of "flying saucers" from other worlds becomes not a ridiculous theory, but an unproved possibility. For this reason the Editors of the Technic urge you to read this thought-provoking and challenging article.

by ARLEIGH J. DAGENAIS, '61E

The date was June 24, 1947. Mr. Kenneth Arnold departed from Chehalis, Washington, bound for Yakima, Washington, on a routine flight in his private plane. Mr. Arnold had made many such flights previously and was considered an excellent mountain pilot. As he neared Mount Rainier, the second highest peak in the continental United States, he saw with a start what appeared to be a chain of unfamiliar aircraft. Observing more closely, he distinguished a string of nine very bright, disk-shaped objects, estimating them to be about 45 to 50 feet in length. As they flew, the objects wove in and out between the mountain peaks. Regaining his composure, Arnold marked their position on a map and noted the time, a procedure which he again repeated some 102 seconds later. With this data, a hurried computation put the objects' speed at almost 1700 miles per hour.¹ No aircraft known at that time could approach even half that speed. When Arnold's story broke, it was so unusual that papers all over the world gave it front-page space. Thus began the era of the "flying saucer."

It was only three months later, September, 1947, that the Air Force organized a formal project for UFO (unidentified flying object) investigation. The project was established under the jurisdiction of the Air Technical Intelligence Center (ATIC), one of the most highly specialized intelligence agencies in the Air Force. Most of these intelligence specialists were confident that within a few months' time they would have the answer to the question, "What are UFO's?"

People who have attempted to answer this question fall into three groups separated according to the different theories concerning those airborne phenomena. There is a fourth group if one considers the perennial hoaxers and the writers of saucer lore who print more fiction than fact. This latter group, however, will be ignored in this article. One group consists of those who feel that all UFO sightings can be explained as natural occurrences. Another group, whose position might be called neutral, is the organization (ATIC) of the U.S. Air Force, which gathered and investigated the thousands of reports and facts of the UFO story. A third group consists of the believers in interplanetary space craft.

Natural Occurrences?

Donald H. Menzel, Professor of Astrophysics at Harvard University, was a

leading exponent of the group which considered all saucer sightings as natural phenomena. He believed that people did see unusual phenomena but the sightings were not alien aircraft. What the observers saw was not imaginary but could be attributed to some event of nature. He did not place much faith in the ability of many observers to correctly interpret their observations. In the Arnold sighting, Menzel derived from Arnold's statement that the objects' speed was only 50 miles per hour. Menzel concluded that what Arnold really saw was billowing blasts of snow lifted from the mountains by turbulent air. These shifting, tilting clouds of snow reflected the sun as mirrors.² Many of Professor Menzel's explanations of other saucer incidents were to be closely congruent. Haze, reflections in fog or mist, and ice crystals in the sky reflecting the sun's rays were the majority of his conclusions.

Menzel's theories did not pass without challenge, however. Why were not such sightings reported before 1947? And, concerning the Arnold report specifically, could billowing blasts of snow be traveling at, or at least appear to be traveling at, a speed of 500 miles per hour?

The ATIC saucer investigation group did not receive first-hand information on the Arnold sighting. In fact, one might say the Air Force investigating group was a result of the incident. However, when one ATIC expert was later asked to comment on Professor Menzel's statement of "wind whipping snow," his answer was a flat, "impossible." He asserted that he had lived in the Pacific Northwest for many years, and that it would be impossible to find powdered snow so low in the mountains in June.³ Project Blue Book, as the Air Force group was coded, labeled the Arnold report "unknown."

The Mantell Crash

Tragedy entered the picture in January of 1948. A National Guard pilot was killed chasing a UFO. On that afternoon, control tower operators of Godman Air Force Base, outside Louisville, Kentucky, received a query from the state police as to the possibility of any unusual aircraft in the vicinity. A quick check by the operators with appropriate agencies met with a negative answer. Many people in outlying districts near the air base reported an unknown object in the sky, moving in the general direction of Godman. A half hour later, the tower operators sighted the object and called the base operations officer,



In 1954 it was believed that U. S. Navy balloons like the one shown here were the cause of many "flying saucer" reports.

who came to the tower to have a look at the object through binoculars. No one could identify the object. Minutes later, four F-51's, single engine fighter aircraft, flew across the field. The flight leader, Captain Mantell, was called by radio and asked to take a look at the object and try to identify it. Mantell climbed his aircraft into the sky and was soon lost from sight. After a few minutes of silence, Mantell called the tower and said, "I see something above and ahead of me and I'm still climbing . . . I've sighted the thing. It looks metallic and it's tremendous in size . . . It's above me and I'm gaining on it. I'm going to 20,000 feet." Captain Mantell never talked to anyone again. The tower

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lost sight of the UFO and later received word that Mantell had crashed and was dead.⁴

Professor Menzel's explanation of the encounter declared that Mantell was chasing a "mock sun," caused by ice crystals in cirrus clouds higher than Mantell's plane could safely reach. Since the aircraft was not equipped with oxygen, Menzel theorized that Mantell went above his limit, blacked out, lost control of the F-51, and subsequently crashed.

The interplanetary advocates reported that a few of Mantell's plane fragments had strange grooves in the metal, and more revealing, a high measure of radioactivity caused perhaps by an intense wake of discharging atom-forced radiation energy from the huge object.⁵ The Air Force strongly denied these reports.

At the time of the Mantell incident, the ATIC UFO project was involved in a series of shifts in policy because of changes in leadership. First, the group adopted an "explain them all away" attitude and later returned to an honest attempt at reaching unbiased conclusions. For example, it was first announced by the Air Force that Mantell was killed while chasing the planet Venus. At certain times of the year, this particular planet becomes bright enough to be mistaken as a foreign object approaching the earth. The Air Force stated that Mantell had climbed toward Venus until he became unconscious from insufficient oxygen. Later, after a more thorough investigation, it was determined that Venus could not have been bright enough to confuse an experienced pilot. It was also learned that a giant 100-foot diameter "skyhood" balloon, sent aloft in Minnesota for gathering weather data, might possibly have been in the Godman field area on that day and that it may have been the huge object. This was the solution finally decided upon by Project Blue Book.

Chasing "Saucers" Over the Capital

It was in July of 1952, that the "flying saucer" report, which won more world attention than any other, hit the headlines in our nation's capital. At 11:40 p.m., July 19, the two radar sets at Washington National Airport picked up eight unidentified targets. They were not ordinary aircraft because they would loaf at 100 to 130 miles per hour and then suddenly accelerate to fantastically high speeds and leave the area. During the night, crews of several airliners saw mysterious lights in the same locations that the radar pin-pointed the targets. Tower operators also saw lights, and jet fighters were dispatched, but the uncanny lights seemed to be able to anticipate the fighters' every movement and the objects were always gone before the jets could "close."

The morning's headlines were "Interceptors Chase Flying Saucers Over Washington, D. C.!" The two radar sets at Washington National Airport were checked and found in perfect working order. One set was located in the control tower and the other, a long-range radar set controlling the air lanes for miles around, was located in the Air Route Traffic Control Center.

A week later, the mysterious objects again appeared. One UFO was clocked at 7,000 miles per hour; other objects flew through the prohibited flying area over the White House and Capitol. Airliners were followed to within a few miles of touchdown on the runways. Ninety degree turns at high speeds were executed repeatedly. Interceptors were again called and just as the jets approached the area, the targets disappeared off the scopes. The jets flew around for awhile, saw nothing, and left the Washington area. In a few minutes, the unidentified objects were back on the radar scopes. Another jet was contacted and this time the pilot saw a light and

started toward it, but suddenly it went out, "as though a light bulb had been turned off." The pilot and his radar observer continued the run and a radar lockon was established, but it was soon broken. Two more lockons were obtained but also broken after a few seconds. During this time, people all over the area were calling in that weird, bright lights were being seen.⁶

It was not easy to find a reasonable solution. Those who felt there was a solution finally based their arguments on temperature inversions. An inversion occurs when the layer of air nearest the surface of the earth becomes warmer with increasing height. During such an abnormal situation, this warmer air may occur up to a height of 100 meters or so. Above this height the temperature decreases with higher altitudes. These conflicting masses of air may cause radar waves to be reflected resulting in a false indication of positions of objects either in the air or on the ground.

The believers in alien space travelers did not buy this theory. It was easily proved that in Washington, D.C. through the months of June, July, and August there was hardly a day that passed without a temperature inversion. Therefore, they reasoned, why did not fake targets show up more often instead of just on these very few occasions? And, if true, how could these fake targets so shrewdly maneuver when about to be pursued?

Project Blue Book was, of course, pushed very hard for an answer in its investigation of the Capitol incident. This incident had probably aroused more people in high governmental positions than previous sightings, people who had once laughed off the whole saucer affair. The inversion theory was thoroughly investigated, but the one impressive factor was the high caliber of the people involved in the Washington incident. Radar men in positions of air-

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craft control deal with human lives and are assigned accordingly. There can be no error in their work and they are chosen after rigorous training, supervision, and investigation. These men were well qualified, experienced radar men who brought thousands of people into Washington National Airport every day. Such responsible men could be expected to know the difference between a real target and a weather target. ATIC still considers the Washington, D.C. sightings as unknowns.

The Future Probability

These were only a few of the many hundreds of qualified UFO reports. The people who saw these strange occurrences, who investigated the reports and who engaged in the controversy in explaining them were of the highest caliber. Airline pilots, scientists, professors and many others of the utmost reliability saw and reported UFO sightings. The number of unexplained sightings is great enough to cause much speculation. There is no tangible proof that space ships from other planets exist, but the possibilities are fascinating, and as time passes, their existence becomes more and more probable. Perhaps some day we will know the true answer to the "flying saucer" question. And as some believe, it may be one of the greatest events that has happened to man.

¹Edward J. Ruppelt, *The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects*, 1956, p. 27.

²Donald H. Menzel, *Flying Saucers*, 1953, p. 9.

³Edward J. Ruppelt, *The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects*, 1956, p. 30.

⁴Ruppelt, *Op. cit.*, pp. 46-48.

⁵Gerald Heard, *Is Another World Watching?* 1950, 1951, p. 28.

⁶Edward J. Ruppelt, *The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects*, 1956, pp. 110-118.



The luminous disk was photographed in Dolomites by Angelo Cozzi, who first thought it was the moon, but he claimed the object immediately sped away.