

# THE UFO SILENCERS

By John A. Keel

Planes were a rare sight in 1924. A few hardy air mail pilots were just beginning to blaze trails in rickety old biplanes, and a handful of barnstormers were turning up at county fairs in decrepit Jennies left over from WW I. But most Americans had never even seen an airplane and when a sputtering engine sounded in the skies over cities and suburbs people ran into the streets to gape with wonder.

In May of that year there was great excitement on the isolated farms near Gem, W. Va., in Braxton County when a huge aircraft suddenly appeared, bobbing and weaving closer and closer to the ground until it dipped down into a thick forest and apparently crashed. According to the farmer who watched it go down, it was "as big as a battleship" and didn't seem to have any wings. In those days, every plane crash was big news commanding headlines around the world so a local newsman, the late John Cole, eagerly joined the party that went searching for the wreckage. They systematically scoured the woods and within hours they found the wreck in a small clearing.

"We weren't the first ones there, though," Cole recalled more than 40 years later. "There were already five or six men in the clearing. Some of them

This much is known about those mysterious Men In Black who show up after almost every important saucer sighting or landing: they do not represent any known government; their basic purpose is to discredit or terrorize eyewitnesses; and they have seized or obliterated all UFO evidence for more than 27 years!

were dressed in black business suits, neckties and all, and that seemed damned silly in that part of the woods. Others were dressed in coveralls of a funny color . . . some kind of very shiny material. They were talking among themselves in a rapid-fire foreign language when we found them. They got real excited when they saw us. The men in coveralls ran into the wreck . . . like they were trying to hide. Some of our men were carrying guns and one of them said to me, 'By God, they're spies!' and he started to raise his rifle. I told him to put it down.

"The strangers were all small, just a little over five feet tall, and they all looked like Orientals. You know, with high cheekbones, slant eyes, and dark skin. One of them spoke English with a peculiar accent. He told us nobody was hurt, that everything was all right. He said he would call on the sheriff later and make a complete report. But he never did. There wasn't much we could do. No crime had been committed. Nobody was hurt."

John Cole was in his 80s at the time of the interview, but his mind was sharp and his memory was clear. He had not read anything about flying saucers, he claimed, and was unfamiliar with the Men In Black lore.

"Here's the real funny part," he con-

tinued. "While I was looking around I spotted a little metal thingamajig on the ground. I picked it up and decided to keep it. I put it in my pocket. We all finally went away, leaving the foreigners to fuss with their contraption. It didn't look like much of a flying machine. In fact, it was a wonder it could fly at all. It was like the fuselage of a modern plane, with windows and all. But it didn't have any wings, tail, or propellers. And, like the farmer said, it was mighty big. I'd say it was at least 75 feet long. It filled the whole clearing.

"I went back home. I was living outside of Weston in those days. I went right to bed. I was pretty tired from all the day's hiking. About three a.m. somebody started pounding on my door. I got up and looked and there was an Army officer standing there. He was dressed in one of those broad-brimmed hats they used to wear, with those leg wrappings and all. It was a U.S. Army uniform all right. I was in the Big War. But we didn't see many soldiers in West Virginia in those days. Anyway, except for his clothes he looked just like those foreigners from the airplane. Slant eyes, dark skin, but maybe he was a little taller.

"He said, 'You picked up something yesterday. We need it back.' I was fast asleep and at first I couldn't think what he meant. Then I remembered that metal thingamajig. It was still in my coat pocket so I went and got it.

"I asked him, 'Is this what you mean?' He didn't answer. Just took it and walked off without a word. He didn't seem to have a horse or a car. I shuffled back to bed. But the next day I started wondering about it. How had he managed to track me down? A couple of days later I went back to those woods and found that clearing. It was empty. The grass and bushes were all crushed down where the airplane had been but there was no other sign of anything or anybody. The farmer said he had seen some lights in the sky the next night and thought the thing had taken off then.

"You know, I never wrote the story up for my newspaper. After that Army officer came by I figured that maybe it was a secret Army deal of some kind and I thought I had better leave well enough alone."

Braxton County produced a series of UFO and monster sightings in the 1950s and 60s, and I ran into Mr. Cole while I was investigating some of those more recent events. Several years later I received a letter from a man in the northwest recounting an almost identical incident which supposedly happened in Oregon in the 1930s. A strange plane had crashed. Local farmers collected pieces of it, and shortly afterwards Army officers visited them

and rounded up the "souvenirs." Variations of this charade have occurred in England in 1909, and, more recently, in Spain. Modern UFO investigators have vainly tried to link these mystery men with the CIA and the military, accusing them of being part of some massive conspiracy to hide "the truth" about flying saucers from the public. But hundreds of similar episodes have now been reported and closely examined by highly qualified civilian researchers. It is evident that these Men In Black (so named because they are usually dressed in black suits) do not represent any *known* government but are actually related to the UFO phenomenon itself. Their basic purpose is to spread confusion and prevent official investigators from learning the truth about UFOs. They have done their job well. Despite 27 years of controversy and investigation, no real evidence of any kind has fallen into the hands of the authorities. Aside from scorched circles of grass and holes in the ground, no physical debris from a flying saucer has reached official investigators. Even worse, the clever manipulations of the MIB have succeeded in convincing both official and amateur investigations that many true UFO reports were nothing more than pointless "hoaxes." In several instances, witnesses and investigators have even been discredited altogether by such manipulations.

Since most UFO enthusiasts believe that flying saucers are space vehicles from another planet they cannot fit the apparently very human MIB into their theories. Multi-armed bug-eyed monsters are more acceptable as UFO pilots than olive-skinned, Oriental-looking gentlemen. There have been monster reports in the growing number of landing and contact cases, of course, but reports of the human-type ufonauts greatly outnumber them. This is why some leading UFO researchers speculated for years that flying saucers might really be coming from behind the Bamboo Curtain in Asia. But in 1967 the Soviet news agency Tass openly accused the CIA of controlling the phenomenon and causing the widespread sightings in Tashkent which is in southwestern Russia. Those sightings somehow inspired a revival of religious beliefs and Soviet officials viewed such actions as part of some fiendish capitalist conspiracy.

Today the term Men In Black is generic and is applied to any mysterious stranger who appears at the site of a paranormal event. They do not always dress in black or look Oriental. Instead of having the classic olive complexion, some appear to be deeply tanned . . . even during the middle of the winter. They often walk unsteadily,

like they are drunk, and display other symptoms of the bends (a reaction to too much nitrogen in the blood). They speak slowly, parrot-like, as if they are reciting memorized speeches. Their dark eyes are usually described as being "hypnotic." Many witnesses have also commented on their hair, which is usually an unnatural color as if it were dyed. Some have very short hair, like a crew cut just growing back in, with a neatly shaved circle toward the back of the head. They don't have much of a sense or humor but when they do laugh a kind of insane cackle escapes their lips. Some seem to have difficulty breathing, gasping between words. In a few cases the MIB seemed perfectly normal in every respect until they made a small blunder of some kind. When offered a dish of Jello one of these more "normal" types tried to drink it. Offered a cigar, another tried to chew it up and eat it rather than light it.

The majority of the MIB are well-dressed in expensively cut suits, usually black or gray, and made of a glossy, slightly reflective material. In a number of reports they were seen wearing shoes with unusually thick rubber soles. One odd consistency in these reports is the fact that their clothing usually seems to be brand-new. The soles of their shoes look unwalked upon. They look as if they have just left their haberdashers. Yet in a number of instances their brand-new clothes were strangely out of date. They were wearing styles that had been out of fashion for several years or, even more odd, they were dressed in styles which came into fashion several years later! The same peculiar feature is apparent in their vehicles. They have been seen in automobiles that were 20 years old—or older—yet were as perfect as a showroom model. Witnesses who have entered the MIB vehicles have even reported that they *smelled* new.

Black Cadillacs with heavily tinted windows seem to be their preferred mode of transportation but in recent years they have also appeared in Volkswagens and Fords. One witness in the midwest claimed he was visited by a tall, extremely thin, cadaver-like man who traveled in a car that seemed to be assembled from the parts of many makes and models. Phantom campers, station wagons, and panel trucks have also been reported with increasing frequency. Witnesses in several cases have managed to get the license numbers of the mysterious vehicles but police checks revealed that no such numbers had been issued!

This is not a phenomenon restricted to the U.S. The MIB have been re-

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ported in many parts of the world, including Italy, Germany, Spain, Great Britain, and Sweden. In 1973, a young Swedish journalist who was working on a UFO story was sitting in a restaurant outside of Stockholm when a stranger walked over to his table and sat down uninvited. "You should give up your interest in flying saucers," he stated flatly in perfect Swedish. Before the startled reporter could ask any questions, the man rose and quickly left the restaurant. The only unusual thing about him was his clothes, the reporter recalled. They didn't seem to fit properly.

There have been countless episodes of this type in the U.S. In 1968, Peter Stevens, a young building contractor near Albany, N.Y., was sitting in a snack bar when "a tall, tan, saturnine-looking man" sat down on the stool beside him.

"There have been people watching the sky every night down by the river in Scotia," the man said suddenly. He stared hard at Stevens. "People who look for UFOs should be very, very careful." Like the Swedish mystery man, this one then made a quick exit. At my request, Stevens later made some drawings of the man. He sent the best one to me. A few weeks later he and his wife returned home to find their house had been ransacked. Nothing was missing *except the MIB drawings!* A few months later, Peter Stevens suddenly died.

Flying saucer contactees seem to have more trouble with these mysterious men than any other single group. It is not unusual for a witness to receive unwelcome nocturnal visitors of this type soon after his encounter with a grounded UFO. The standard procedure is to openly threaten the witness, advising him to keep his UFO experience to himself. If the witness has managed to collect any kind of physical evidence, the MIB will demand it in forceful terms. There are almost endless variations to the games they play, however.

Stanley Gordon, one of Pennsylvania's most active UFO investigators,

has come across several bizarre MIB cases involving not UFOs but tall, hairy monsters. (There has been an epidemic of "Bigfoot"-type monsters seen throughout the U.S. in 1973-74.) In one creature case, the monster appeared outside a house trailer and left some sharply defined footprints. The witnesses reported directly to Gordon. The footprints were not mentioned in the local news media, but while they were photographing the impressions with a Polaroid camera a station wagon with Ohio license plates pulled up. A man who seemed slightly tipsy climbed out, looked at the footprints, and then grabbed the Polaroid snapshots away from the witness. "You have just taken a picture for us," he announced. Then he kicked at the footprints, smothering the dirt over them and destroying the evidence. The witnesses became angry and told him they were going to call the police. He leaped into his vehicle and raced away. As in so many cases, his license numbers were unregistered. (Think about this for a moment. There are nearly 100 million vehicle registrations in the U.S. If you tried to invent a false license number chances are you would come up with a number that is actually in use.)

Sometimes the MIB's tactics are more subtle. They are cunning imposters. For years amateur UFO investigators heard stories about Air Force officers who threatened witnesses into silence. They never bothered to collect descriptions of these officers, but simply assumed that the Air Force was engaged in some kind of conspiracy of silence. Following a wave of such "silencings" in 1967, I discovered that the witnesses had been visited by bogus officers, usually short men with Oriental features, who adopted the names of actual military personnel from nearby bases. For instance, if a Sergeant Snodgrass was stationed nearby, a "Colonel Snodgrass" would drop in on local witnesses. In February 1967, Air Force Headquarters in the Pentagon recognized the problem by issuing a letter to all commands urging security officers to be alert for these phantom airmen. Since impersonating a military officer is a violation of federal

law, the FBI was also alerted and their agents became involved in several UFO episodes. But the MIB remained elusive.

On several occasions I came within minutes of crossing paths with the energetic MIB. While visiting witnesses on New York's Long Island in the spring of 1967 I checked into a motel chosen at random. Before I had a chance to unpack my toothbrush the phone rang and I found myself talking to a deep male voice speaking in a flat monotone like a recording. He advised me to drive to a place called High Hold, the highest point on Long Island, at midnight. Before I could ask any questions the line went dead. So I wearily drove up the narrow dirt roads, convinced I was the victim of a hoax. But when I reached the rendezvous point I was astonished to find a large black limousine parked and waiting. As I drove slowly past, the limousine flashed its headlights on and off. I could make out two men in the front seat and in the dim light they looked decidedly Oriental. I had to drive a few yards before I could turn around. I planned to pull up and park behind the limousine but when I drew close to it the driver started his engine and drove slowly away. I followed the car up and down the winding hills until it passed out of sight behind a curve. When I rounded the curve I was surprised to find the road was a dead end and the car had completely vanished. There were no side roads or turnoffs.

Later I decided the entire episode had been arranged to convince me that the witnesses were telling the truth when they talked about Orientals in black Cadillacs. During my subsequent investigations in several different states I had other fleeting encounters with the mystery men and their ghostly vehicles.

Scores of other investigators, including well-known personalities such as Ivan T. Sanderson, Otto Binder, Brad Steiger, Dr. James McDonald, and Dr. J. Allen Hynek, also became involved in MIB cases. All of us had unwelcome experiences with mysterious telephone monitors. Sanderson's phone on his farm in the mountains of New

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Jersey was plagued with harassing noises and interference, and his mail was apparently being closely watched. While Otto Binder was writing his first book on the UFO phenomenon in March 1967, he, too, was subject to telephone harassment. Peter Stevens and his wife had their phone number changed several times but the telephone harassment persisted, even after they switched to an unlisted number. Investigators continue to have these problems. Stan Gordon recently revealed "a great amount of mail containing reports from our investigators and signed affidavits from witnesses never arrived at our office. One investigator who had detailed information on a very strange case, mailed the report to us three different times, and we still never received any of them."

Investigators in Sweden, England, and Germany have reported similar problems. These manipulations have contributed to the atmosphere of paranoia which has dominated the UFO field for years. The common conclusion is that only the government—the CIA or the military—has the machinery needed to tap large numbers of phones and intercept the mails. But I learned that these same problems often plagued the official investigators. Official reports and photographs sent by mail instead of courier have disappeared or even been switched en route with doctored documents! Of course, the official nightmare began in 1947 when two Air Force officers were killed in a plane crash after investigating the strange events in Tacoma Harbor. They were carrying a box of metallic debris which had allegedly showered from a UFO over Maury Island, Wash., that June. The box was not recovered from the wreckage.

The MIB seem to have an intelligence organization that makes our CIA seem like a bunch of cub scouts. They have often zeroed in on UFO witnesses who have not disclosed their sightings to anyone. It is not unusual for a family to return to their home after watching UFOs cavort above their front yard and have the phone ring immediately, sometimes with nothing but silence on the other end, sometimes with a mysterious voice warning them to keep their mouths shut.

In 1969, a blonde woman visited witnesses in West Virginia and Ohio, winning instant admission to their homes by claiming to be "John Keel's secretary." Somehow this woman was able to locate people I had interviewed but had never written about. She carried a clipboard and asked a series of involved, very sophisticated questions . . . not the kind of questions usually asked by UFO enthusiasts or even by the Air Force. Over the years other

pseudo-investigators have turned up claiming to represent nonexistent universities, or posing as representatives of amateur organizations like NICAP and APRO while they deliberately acted in strange, suspicious ways and added to the dissension which has always kept the UFO field in confusion.

Investigators who suspected their mail was being screened have suddenly received batches of mail from communist and neo-Nazi organizations. If any government agency was actually watching their mail it would look as if they were engaged in subversive activities.

Confusion, deception, and paranoia are the MIB's stock in trade. It becomes impossible to sort the genuine government agents from the frauds. The late Frank Edwards a radio newsman and best-selling UFO author, reported the story of a minor official in a large industrial plant who saw a huge glowing object at 4:30 a.m. one morning in December 1965. The man stopped on his way home and reported the sighting to the State Police. A few hours later "two military officers" appeared at his plant and questioned him for two hours. At the conclusion of the interview one of the officers said, "We can't tell you what to do, but we can offer a suggestion: Don't talk about this matter to anyone."

How had the two officers heard of the sighting and moved so fast? And why would they go through so much trouble over a fairly routine sighting?

Dr. J. Allen Hynek, the astronomer who has been active in UFO research for many years, tells of two men "engaged in work requiring a military clearance" who saw a UFO land in North Dakota on a rainy night in November 1961. Thinking it was a plane in trouble, they stopped their car and ran toward the object. "Their surprise was understandably great when they discovered humanoids around the craft, one of which boldly waved them off in a threatening manner," Hynek says.

The men did not report their sighting, but the next day one of them was called out from work and introduced to two strangers. "They asked to be taken to his home," Hynek reported, "where they examined the clothing he had worn the night before, especially his boots, and left without further word."

How had the pair located the witness? And why the interest in his shoes? When the two men who were allegedly taken aboard a UFO near Mississippi's Pascagoula River in 1973 were examined at a nearby Air Force base, the military doctors carefully examined their shoes and scraped samples from their soles.

Betty and Barney Hill, another pair of famous contactees, threw the shoes

they had been wearing at the time of their abduction into the back of a closet. Later they found the shoes were covered with a powdery fungus.

Some MIB incidents have been the work of mischievous UFO fans—mere hoaxes. For example, shortly before the mammoth flying saucer convention held in New York in June 1967 many of the well-known UFO enthusiasts in the New York area received phone calls from a lady identifying herself as "Princess Moon Owl." She claimed she had just arrived from the asteroid Ceres. The lady managed to create quite an uproar in UFO circles.

All the speakers at the 1967 convention were taped by a young man who planned to make copies of the speeches for later sale. He lived in an exclusive apartment house in midtown Manhattan, in an apartment cluttered with expensive electronic gear, and short wave radios. Soon after the convention ended, he returned to his apartment one day and found someone had broken in. The convention tapes were scattered around the room but none of his valuable equipment had been stolen. Whoever had broken in was obviously interested in the tapes only, and the tape of Ivan Sander's speech in particular. Sander had studied the UFO phenomenon for years and was convinced that it was a terrestrial-based mystery, not the work of an "advanced technology" from some distant planet. Later he published a book on that theme, risking the wrath of all those who believed in extraterrestrial intelligences.

In my own investigations into hundreds of MIB cases and Watergate-style break-ins, I uneasily recognized a common factor in all of them. *Our Men In Black are mainly interested in retrieving evidence which might point to terrestrial origin of the UFOs.*

The earliest MIB incidents back in 1947 revolved around cases in which the witnesses had either recovered earthly substances at UFO sites, or had seen earthmen or normal terrestrial vehicles in conjunction with their sightings. The MIB were concerned with recovering such evidence and discrediting these eyewitnesses. (Although these cases are usually slighted by UFO investigators who believe in extraterrestrial visitants, there are many episodes—reliably witnessed—in which UFOs have descended and discharged passengers who then entered ordinary automobiles and drove off.)

One of the first UFO investigators to be harassed by the MIB had figured out—correctly—that UFOs seemed to originate from some point near the North and South Poles. Other investigators who have discarded the extraterrestrial hypothesis and studied the earthly links with the phenomenon

have experienced more harassment, mail, and phone problems, etc., than their colleagues who believe in outer space vehicles. If you collect a piece of unidentifiable metal from a UFO witness you will have no problems. But if a witness hands you a piece of aluminum, magnesium, or silicon, all common earthly substances, you are very apt to receive a visit from the Men In Black.

Some witnesses who tall victim to these charades do not consciously understand the importance of what they have seen. Nor do the investigators who believe in the extraterrestrial hypothesis realize the importance of these cases. In fact, it is common practice for the amateur UFO organizations to denounce such cases as hoaxes and brand the witnesses liars—or worse—when they find their “evidence” is plain old aluminum. They can be excused for this, though, since the U.S. Air Force has also labeled many cases “hoax” for the same reasons.

If any real suppression exists, it is to conceal evidence of terrestrial origin. Whoever is waging this campaign has agents around the world, and technical facilities surpassing those of any known government.

By mid-1967 my own conclusions had changed dramatically. I began to

freely discuss and write about the terrestrial origin of UFOs. During a trip to Washington, D.C., I was invited to record an hour-long tape for “Voice of America.” At that time the late Al Johnson was doing a series of UFO programs which were broadcast throughout the world over VOA. Johnson interviewed me for an hour and I discussed at length the theory of terrestrial origin. A few days later he phoned me full of apologies. Our tape had inadvertently been placed in “the wrong pile” and had been completely erased before it could be broadcast. It was just one of those things.

*Or was it?*

That same year, a team from a German television station was touring America interviewing UFO witnesses and investigators. They were seasoned professional technicians. They came to my New York apartment, set up all their expensive equipment, and filmed me for 30 minutes. A few days later I received a call from their Washington office. Their film of me was unusable. Parts were overexposed, and the magnetic sound track was spoiled by inexplicable static. It was just another one of those things.

Variations of these “coincidences” continually happen. Radio and TV transmitters suddenly go dead during UFO discussions. Vital tapes are mys-

teriously erased. Precious photographs are lost in the mails. Investigators' telephones suddenly go dead at the height of a UFO wave. (The line of my phone was physically cut by a pair of wire cutters *twice* in 1967.)

In 1974, *France Inter*, the Paris radio station, aired a series of 39 programs about UFOs, beginning with a pro-UFO talk by Robert Galley, France's Minister of Defense. French broadcasters had spent much of 1973 locating and recording statements by leading authorities in France, England, and the U.S. The list was an impressive one and included such luminaries as Dr. David Saunders, the psychologist at Colorado University who has been programming thousands of UFO sightings for computers; Dr. Jacques Vallee, author of three UFO books; Pierre Kohler, a famous astronomer; and even Cardinal Danielou, a prominent churchman.

The broadcasts were divided into two parts. The first part consisted of statements by witnesses and local French enthusiasts and officials. Hynek, Vallee, and some of the other “advanced” students of the phenomenon were scheduled for the second part. This second section was never aired. Someone broke into the radio station and *stole the tapes!*

Jean-Claude Bourret sent the follow-

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ing explanation to Gordon Creighton, the distinguished British UFO authority: “Unfortunately, on Monday, Mar. 18, 1974, a mysterious burglar carried off all the tapes which were still waiting to be broadcast. That this was an act of deliberate malevolence is beyond question. In the metal press where these taped recordings had been stacked, there were two piles side by side! Those interviews that had already gone out, and those that were still to be broadcast. *Only this second pile was taken.*”

What was the gist of the missing tapes? Like most of the professional scientists and journalists who have undertaken a serious study of UFOs, Dr. Hynek, Jacques Vallee and their colleagues have found the popular ex-

traterrestrial hypothesis untenable. For sometime now they have been weighing the awesome alternative: that UFOs are earthly in origin, are accompanied by so-called psychic manifestations, and are produced by complex distortions of space, time and even of reality itself.

“What the theft was designed to prevent,” Creighton notes, “was the dissemination to millions of French, and other European listeners, that similar views about UFOs are held by foreign experts of the caliber of Dr. J. Allen Hynek...it looks as though ‘somebody’ is mighty anxious that we Earthlings do not learn the truth about ‘something’ which, I suggest, might relate to the 64-billion-dollar question: *who owns and controls this*

*planet...and us?”*

Who, indeed, has the ability to control the mails, the telephones, radio and television stations *worldwide*? Are people from some distant planet traveling the back roads of Long Island in black Cadillacs, or was Ivan Sander-son right? Are we dealing with beings who originate on our own planet? Someone has tried very hard for years to convince us that those strange things in our skies are harmless spaceships from some distant world. So long as we believe it, and believe that they originate from far beyond our pitiful reach, we seem to be relatively safe. But when we look in the wrong direction... towards Earth itself... there comes a heavy knock on our door in the middle of the night. ★