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Mr. Ketchum



A surprising report
from the top scientific
authority

ARE FLYING SAUCERS REAL?

HOW MUSSOLINI DIED IN SANTA VITTORIA

From the best-selling novel:

MISSING MILLIONAIRE

A Post reporter solves the mystery of a

POST



Founded in 1728 by

Benjamin Franklin

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December 17, 1966 • 239th year, issue no. 26

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About this issue

In researching his article on Billy Wilder, RICHARD LEMON saw Wilder eight times, made three trips to Los Angeles and one to Cleveland, and saw or re-saw 10 of Wilder's movies. With delays, including one year Lemon took off to work as an editor at the *Post*, the piece took 18 months—which happens to be about the amount of time Wilder spends making a movie. . . .



Joan Didion

Aside from the widely acclaimed novel, *The Secret of Santa Vittoria*, ROBERT CRICHTON is the author of the nonfiction best seller, *The Great Impostor*. . . . JOAN DIDION, who writes here about her impressions of Hawaii, is at work on a second novel titled *Play It As It Lays*. Much of her time now is taken up by her eight-month-old baby, Quintana, named after a territory in Mexico. . . . "The wildest case I've ever been on" is the way investigative reporter JAMES PHELAN describes the mystery he unraveled while on assignment for the *Post*. Phelan's most recent *Post* article (September 10, 1966) was *California Tax Scandal*. | Cover illustration by PAUL CALLE.



Robert Crichton

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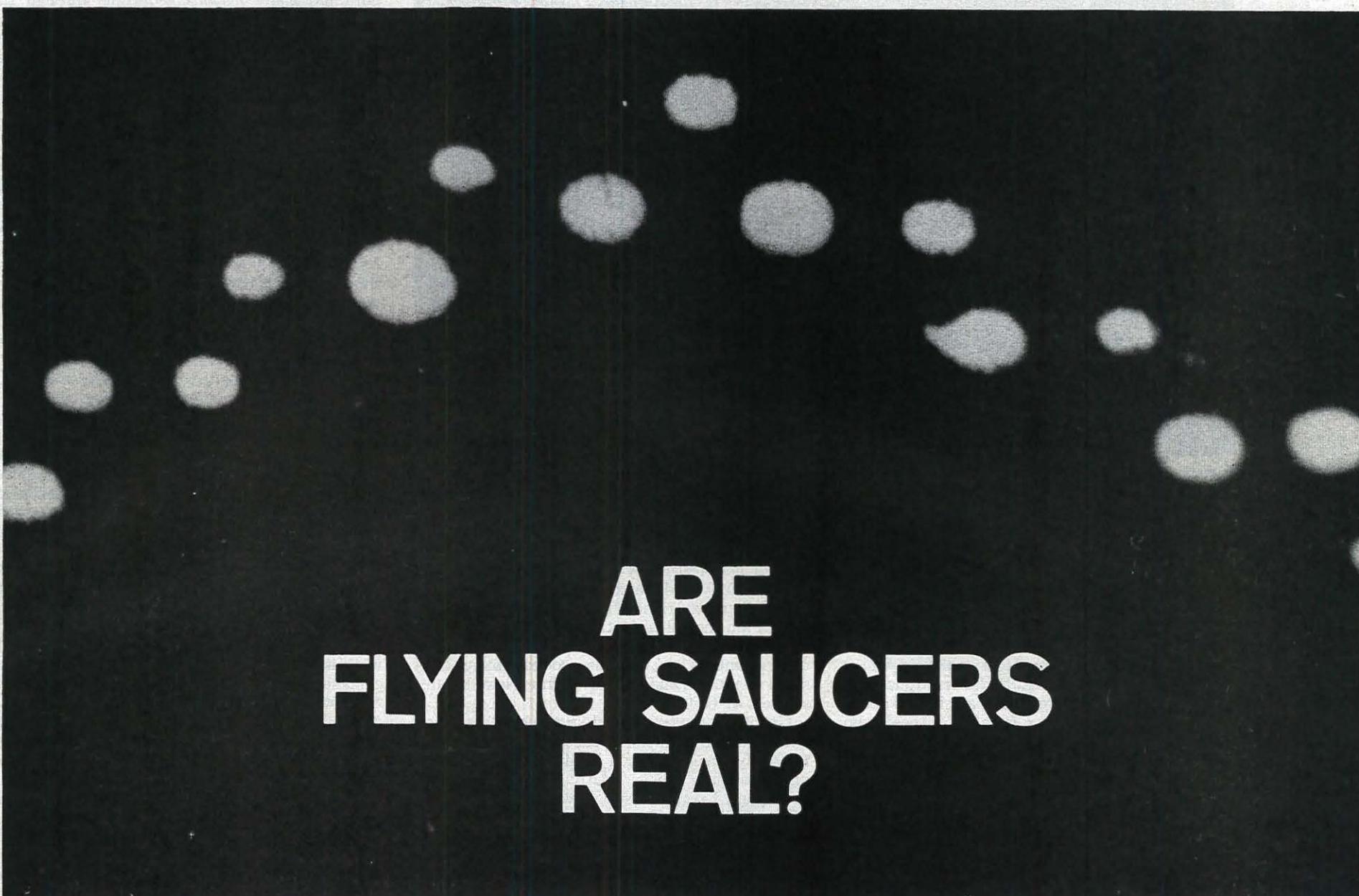
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ARE FLYING SAUCERS REAL?

For years the Air Force has dismissed them as hoaxes, hallucinations or misidentifications. Now the Air Force's own scientific consultant on unidentified flying objects declares that many of the sightings cannot be so easily explained.

On August 25, 1966, an Air Force officer in charge of a missile crew in North Dakota suddenly found that his radio transmission was being interrupted by static. At the time, he was sheltered in a concrete capsule 60 feet below the ground. While he was trying to clear up the problem, other Air Force personnel on the surface reported seeing a UFO—an unidentified flying object—high in the sky. It had a bright red light, and it appeared to be alternately climbing and descending. Simultaneously, a radar crew on the ground picked up the UFO at 100,000 feet.

So begins a truly puzzling UFO report—one that is not explainable as it now stands by such familiar causes as a balloon, aircraft, satellite or meteor. "When the UFO climbed, the static stopped," stated the report made by the base's director of operations. "The UFO began to swoop and dive. It then appeared to land ten to fifteen miles south of the area. Missile-site control

sent a strike team [well-armed Air Force guards] to check. When the team was about ten miles from the landing site, static disrupted radio contact with them. Five to eight minutes later the glow diminished, and the UFO took off. Another UFO was visually sighted and confirmed by radar. The one that was first sighted passed beneath the second. Radar also confirmed this. The first made for altitude toward the north, and the second seemed to disappear with the glow of red."

This incident, which was not picked up by the press, is typical of the puzzling cases that I have studied during the 18 years that I have served as the Air Force's scientific consultant on the problem of UFO's. What makes the report especially arresting is the fact that another incident occurred near the base a few days earlier. A police officer—a reliable man—saw in broad daylight what he called "an object on its edge floating down the side of a hill, wobbling from side to side about ten feet from the

By J. Allen Hynek



A distinguished scientist, Dr. Hynek is now chairman of the department of astronomy at Northwestern University.

ground. When it reached the valley floor, it climbed to about one hundred feet, still tipped on its edge, and moved across the valley to a small reservoir."

The object, which was about 30 feet in diameter, next appeared to flatten out, and a small dome became visible on top. It hovered over the water for about a minute, then moved to a small field, where it appeared to be landing. It did not touch the ground, however, but hovered at a height of about 10 feet some 250 feet away from the witness, who was standing by his parked patrol car. The object then tilted up and disappeared rapidly into the clouds. A fantastic story, yet I interviewed the witness in this case and am personally satisfied that he is above reproach.

During the years that I have been its consultant, the Air Force has consistently argued that UFO's were either hoaxes, hallucinations or misinterpretations of natural phenomena. For the most part I would agree with the Air Force. As a professional astronomer—I am chairman of the department of astronomy at Northwestern University—I have had no trouble explaining the vast majority of the reported sightings.

But I cannot explain them all. Of the 15,000 cases that have come to my attention, several hundred are puzzling, and some of the puzzling incidents, perhaps one in 25, are bewildering. I have wanted to learn much more about these cases than I have been able to get from either the reports or the witnesses.

These special cases have been reported by highly respected, intelligent people who often had technical training—astronomers, airport-tower operators, anthropologists, Air Force officers, FBI personnel, physicians, meteorologists, pilots, radar operators, test pilots and university professors. I have argued for years within the Air Force that these unusual cases needed much more study than they were getting. Now, finally, the Air Force has begun a serious scientific investigation of the UFO phenomena.

The public, I am certain, wants to know what to believe—what *can* be believed—about the "flying-saucer" stories that seem to be growing more sensational all the time. With all loyalty to the Air

Force, and with a deep appreciation of its problems, I now feel it my duty to discuss the UFO mystery fully and frankly. I speak as a scientist with unique experience. To the best of my knowledge, I am the only scientist who has spent nearly 20 years monitoring the UFO situation in this and other countries and who has also read many thousands of reports and personally interviewed many sighters of UFO's.

Getting at the truth of "flying saucers" has been extraordinarily difficult because the subject automatically engenders such instantaneous reactions and passionate beliefs. Nearly all of my scientific colleagues, I regret to say, have scoffed at the reports of UFO's as so much balderdash, although this was a most unscientific reaction since virtually none of them had ever studied the evidence. Until recently my friends in the physical sciences wouldn't even discuss UFO's with me. The subject, in fact, rarely came up. My friends were obviously mystified as to how I, a scientist, could have gotten mixed up with "flying saucers" in the first place. It was a little as though I had been an opera singer who had suddenly taken it into his head to perform in a cabaret. It was all too embarrassing to bring up in polite conversation.

While the scientists were chuckling at UFO's, a number of groups of zealous citizens were telling the public that "flying saucers" did indeed exist. The believers in UFO's charged the Air Force with concealing the existence of "flying saucers" to avoid a public panic. Since I was the Air Force's consultant, these groups accused me of selling out as a scientist, because I did not admit that UFO's existed. I was the Air Force's stooge, its tame astronomer, a man more concerned with preserving his consultant's fee than with disclosing the truth to the public.

I received many letters attacking me for not attacking the Air Force. One typical writer pointed out that as a scientist my first allegiance was to "fact." He went on to state, "Any person who has closely followed the UFO story knows that many reports have been 'explained away' in a manner that can only be called ludicrous."

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The question of UFO's has developed into a battle of faiths. One side, which is dedicated to the Air Force position and backed up by the "scientific establishment," *knows* that UFO's do not exist; the other side *knows* that UFO's represent something completely new in human experience. And then we have the rest of the world, the great majority of people who, if they think about the subject at all, don't know what to think.

The question of whether or not UFO's exist should not be a battle of faiths. It must be a subject for calm, reasoned, scientific analysis.

In 1948, when I first heard of the UFO's, I thought they were sheer nonsense, as any scientist would have. Most of the early reports were quite vague: "I went into the bathroom for a drink of water and looked out of the window and saw a bright light in the sky. It was moving up and down and sideways. When I looked again, it was gone."

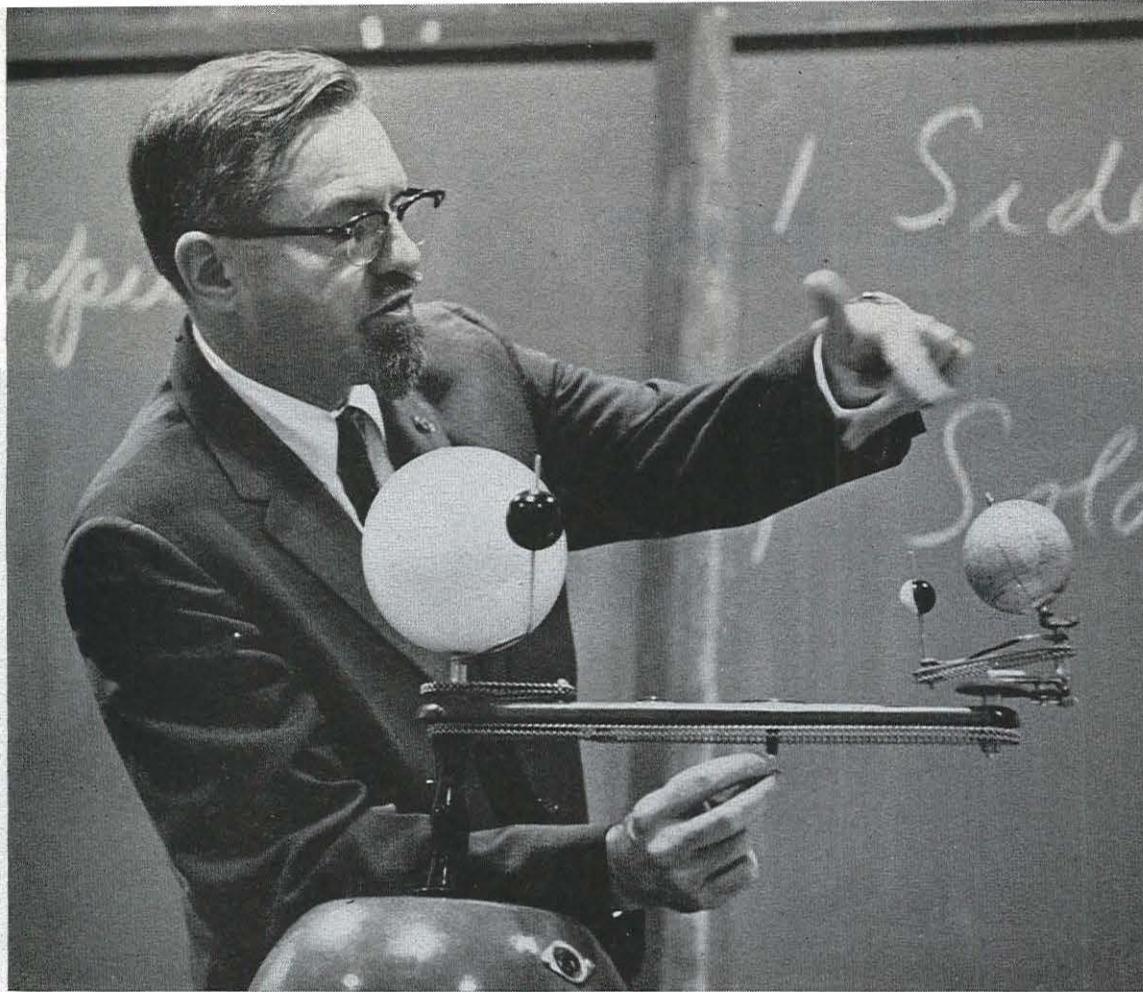
At the time, I was director of the observatory at Ohio State University in Columbus. One day I had a visit from several men from the technical center at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, which was only 60 miles away in Dayton. With some obvious embarrassment, the men eventually brought up the subject of "flying saucers" and asked me if I would care to serve as consultant to the Air Force on the matter.

The job didn't seem as though it would take too much time, so I agreed. When I began reviewing cases, I assumed that there was a natural explanation for all of the sightings—or at least there would be if we could find out enough data about the more puzzling incidents. I generally subscribed to the Air Force view that the sightings were the results of misidentifications, hoaxes or hallucinations.

During the next few years I had no trouble explaining or discarding most of the cases referred to me, but a few were baffling enough to make me wonder—cases that the Air Force would later carry as "unidentified." Let me emphasize the point that the Air Force made up its own mind on each case; I merely submitted an opinion. I soon found that the Air Force had a tendency to upgrade its preliminary explanations while compiling its yearly summaries; a "possible" aircraft often became a "probable" aircraft. I was reminded of the Greek legend of Procrustes, who tried to fit all men to his single bed. If they were too long, he chopped them off; if they were too short, he stretched them out.

Public statements to the contrary, the Air Force has never really devoted enough money or attention to the problem of UFO's to get to the bottom of the puzzling cases. The Air Force's UFO evaluation program, known as "Project Blue Book," is housed in one room at Wright-Patterson. For most of its history Project Blue Book has been headed by a captain. This fact alone will tell anyone familiar with military procedures the relative position of Project Blue Book on the Air Force's organization chart. The staff, which has usually consisted of two officers and a sergeant, has had to try to decide, on the basis of sketchy statements, the causes of all UFO sightings reported to the Air Force. From 1947 through 1965, Project Blue Book reviewed 10,147 cases. Using the Air Force's criteria, the project identified 9,501, leaving over 600 that were carried as unidentified.

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The argument over UFO's became a battle of faiths.

investigating the reports seriously enough led me to write a paper suggesting that the subject deserved much closer study. In 1953 the Air Force did give UFO's more attention, although not nearly enough, to my mind. A panel of some of the top scientists in the country was assembled under the direction of Howard P. Robertson, a distinguished physicist from Cal Tech. The Robertson panel discussed UFO's for four days. Most of the cases, incidentally, were not as puzzling as some of the ones we have now. What was more, the panel was given only 15 reports for detailed study out of the several hundred that had been made up to that time, although it did quickly review many others. This was akin to asking Madame Curie to examine a small fraction of the pitchblende she distilled and still expecting her to come out with radium.

I was listed as an associate member of the panel, but my role was really more that of an observer. After completing its brief survey, the panel concluded that "the evidence presented on unidentified flying objects showed no indication that these phenomena constitute a direct physical threat to the national security," and that "we firmly believe there is no residuum of cases which indicate phenomena which are attributable to foreign artifacts capable of hostile acts, and that there is no evidence that the phenomena indicated a need for revision of current scientific concepts." It is interesting to note the phrase "we firmly believe," a phrase more appropriate to the cloth than to the scientific fraternity.

The Robertson report immediately became the main justification of the Air Force's position—there is nothing to worry about—and it so remains to this day. I was not asked to sign the report, but I would not have signed if I had been asked. I felt that the question was more complicated than the panel believed, and that history might look back someday and say that the panel had acted hastily. The men took just four days to make a judgment upon a perplexing subject that I had studied for more than five years without being able to solve to my satisfaction.

In 1953, the year of the Robertson report, there occurred one of the most puzzling cases that I have studied. It was reported first in Black Hawk, S. Dak., and then in Bismarck, N. Dak., during the night of August 5 and the early morning of August 6. A number of persons in Black Hawk reported seeing several strange objects in the sky. What made these reports particularly significant was the fact that these people were trained observers—they were part of the national network of civilians who were keeping watch for enemy bombers.

At approximately the same time, unidentified blips showed up on the radarscope at Ellsworth Air Force Base, which is near Black Hawk. An airborne F-84 fighter was vectored into the area and reported seeing the UFO's. The pilot radioed that one of the objects appeared to be over Piedmont, S. Dak., and was moving twice as fast as his jet fighter. It was "brighter than the brightest star" he had ever seen. When the pilot gave chase, the light "just disappeared." Five civilians on the ground, who had watched the jet chase the light, confirmed the pilot's report.

Later a second F-84 was sent aloft and directed toward the UFO, which still showed on ground radar. After several minutes, the pilot reported seeing an object with a light of varying intensity that alternated from white to green. While the pilot was pursuing the UFO, he noted that his gunsight light had flashed on, indicating that his plane's radar was picking up a target. The object was directly ahead of his aircraft but at a slightly greater altitude. It then climbed very rapidly. When the pilot saw he was hopelessly losing

ground, he broke off the chase. Radar operators on the ground tracked the fighter coming back from the chase, while the UFO continued on out of range of the scope.

As the object sped off to the north, Ellsworth Air Force Base notified the spotters' control center in Bismarck, 220 miles to the north, where a sergeant then went out on the roof and saw a UFO. The Air Force had no planes in Bismarck that could be sent after the UFO, which finally disappeared later that night.

I investigated this reported sighting myself and was unable to find a satisfactory explanation. In my report, I noted that "the entire incident, in my opinion, has too much of an *Alice in Wonderland* flavor for comfort."

It was about this time that some firm believers in UFO's became disgusted with the Air Force and decided to take matters into their own hands, much like the vigilantes of the Old West; they organized "to do the job the Air Force was mishandling." These groups, composed of people with assorted backgrounds, were often the recipients of intriguing reports that never came to the official attention of Project Blue Book. The first group of this kind in the United States was the APRO (Aerial

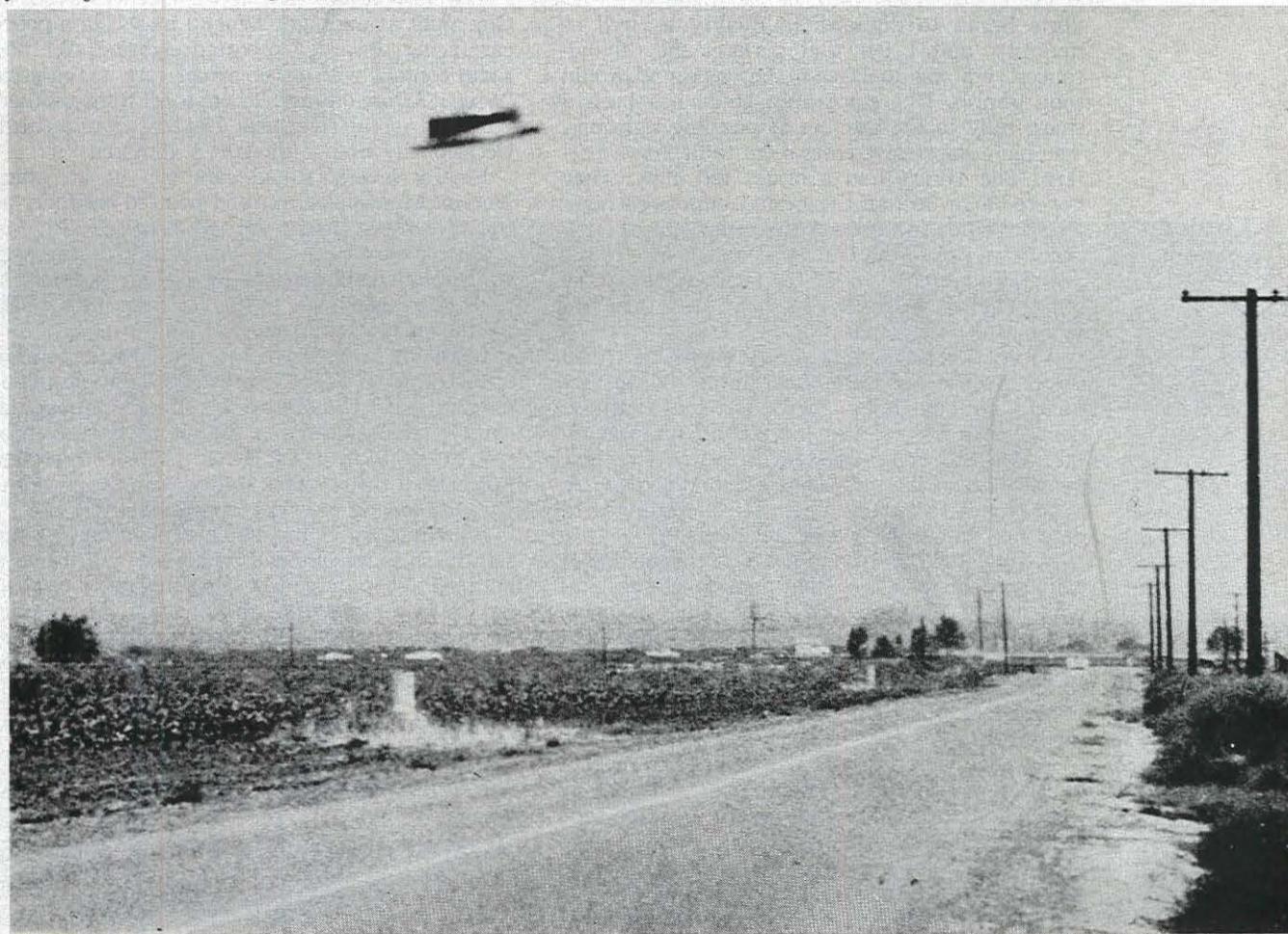
Phenomena Research Organization), founded in 1952 and still going strong, as is NICAP (National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena), which was organized several years later.

As the years went by, I learned more and more about the global nature of UFO sightings. At first I had assumed that it was a purely American phenomenon, like swallowing goldfish. But reports of sightings kept coming in from around the world until 70 countries were on the list. As a scientist, I naturally was interested in correlating all of the data; a zoologist studying red ants in Utah, say, wants to find out about a new species found along the Amazon. But when I suggested to the Air Force that the air attachés abroad be used to gather reports on foreign sightings, I was turned down. No one in a position of authority seemed to want to take up the time of the officers with such an embarrassing subject.

Gradually I began to accumulate cases that I really couldn't explain, cases reported by reliable, sincere people whom I often interviewed in person. I found that the persons making these reports were often not acquainted with UFO's before their experience, which baffled and thoroughly frightened them. Fearing ridicule, they were often reluctant to report the sighting and did so only out of a sense of duty and a tremendous desire to get a rational explanation for their irrational experience. One typical letter to me concluded with the sentence: "Hoping you don't think I'm nuts, but not caring if you do, Sincerely, . . ."

We had many reports from people of good repute, yet we had no scientifically incontrovertible evidence—authenticated movies, spectrograms of reported lights, "hardware"—on which to make

One of the basic problems of solving the UFO mystery, according to Dr. Hynek, is the lack of authenticated photographs of the phenomenon. The man who took this shot near Santa Ana, Calif., said that the object was about 30 feet wide and 700 feet away. But Air Force experts ruled that the thing was much smaller and closer, and refused to validate the picture.



a judgment. There are no properly authenticated photographs to match any of the vivid prose descriptions of visual sightings. Some of the purported "photographs" are patent hoaxes. Others show little detail; they could be anything. Some show a considerable amount of detail, but cannot be substantiated.

The evidence for UFO's, then, was entirely without physical proof. But were *all* of the responsible citizens who made reports mistaken or victims of hallucinations? It was an intriguing scientific question, yet I couldn't find any scientists to discuss it with.

The general view of the scientists was that UFO's couldn't exist, therefore they didn't exist, therefore let's laugh off the idea. This, of course, is a violation of scientific principles, but the history of science is filled with such instances. Some scientists refused to look through Galileo's telescope at sunspots, explaining that "since the sun was perfect, it couldn't have spots, and therefore it was no use looking for them." Other scientists refused to believe in the existence of meteorites; who would be foolish enough to think that a stone could fall from the sky?

From time to time I would urge the Air Force to make a more thorough study of the phenomenon, but nothing ever came of it. I began to feel a very real sense of frustration. As the years went by, I continued to find cases that puzzled me while I examined reports for Project Blue Book. People who were afraid that the Air Force would scoff at their reports began sending me letters that were often detailed and well written about their experiences. The Air Force never attempted to influence my view on any case, but occasionally the service would disregard my evaluations. What was more, I was not consulted on some key cases. (One of the most recent was the well-publicized incident involving two policemen in Ravenna, Ohio, last spring.)

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The entire region was gripped with near-hysteria. One night at midnight I found myself in a police car racing toward a reported sighting. We had radio contact with other squad cars in the area. "I see it" from one car, "there it is" from another, "it's east of the river near Dexter" from a third. Occasionally even I thought I glimpsed "it."

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In the midst of this confusion, I got a message from the Air Force: There would be a press conference, and I would issue a statement about the cause of the sightings. It did me no good to protest, to say that as yet I had no real idea what had caused the reported sightings in the swamps. I was to have a press conference, ready or not.

Searching for a justifiable explanation of the sightings, I remembered a phone call from a botanist at the University of Michigan, who called to my attention the phenomenon of burning "swamp gas." This gas, caused by decaying vegetation, has been known to ignite spontaneously and to cast a flickering light. The glow is well-

known in song and story as "jack-o'-lantern," "fox fire," and "will-o'-the-wisp." After learning more about swamp gas from other Michigan scientists, I decided that it was a "possible" explanation that I would offer to the reporters.

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Too many of the stories the next day not only said that swamp gas was definitely the cause of the Michigan lights but implied that it was the cause of other UFO sightings as well. I got out of town as quickly and as quietly as I could.

I suppose that the swamp-gas incident, which has become a subject for cartoons that I greatly enjoy, was the low point of my association with UFO's. The experience was very obvious proof that public excitement had mounted to the point that it was ridiculous to expect one professor, working alone in the field, to conduct a scholarly investigation. We had quite clearly reached a new stage in the UFO problem.

Three weeks after the Michigan incident I appeared before a hearing into UFO's that was conducted by the House Committee on Armed Services. I pointed out to the committee that I had a dossier of "twenty particularly well-reported UFO cases which, despite the character, technical competence and the number of witnesses, I have not been able to explain." Ten of these reports were made by scientists or by highly trained individuals, five were made by members of the armed services or police, and five were made by other reliable people. The committee urged the Air Force to give continued attention to the subject and was assured by Air Secretary Dr. Harold Brown that it would.

A serious inquiry into the nature of UFO's would be justified, in my opinion, just on the basis of the puzzling cases that have been reported during the last two years. It seems to me that there are now four possible explanations for the phenomena:

First, they are utter nonsense, the result of hoaxes or hallucinations. This, of course, is the view that a number of my scientific colleagues have taken. I think that enough evidence has piled up to shift the burden of proof to the critics who cry fraud. And if the UFO's are merely hallucinations, they still deserve intensive study; we need to learn how the minds of so many men so widely separated can be so deluded over so many years.

Second, the UFO's are some kind of military weapon being tested in secret. This theory is easily dispensed with. Secret devices are usually tested in very limited geographical areas. Why should the United States, or any other country, test them in scores of nations? The problem of preventing a security leak would be impossible.

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a judgment. There are no properly authenticated photographs to match any of the vivid prose descriptions of visual sightings. Some of the purported "photographs" are patent hoaxes. Others show little detail; they could be anything. Some show a considerable amount of detail, but cannot be substantiated.

The evidence for UFO's, then, was entirely without physical proof. But were *all* of the responsible citizens who made reports mistaken or victims of hallucinations? It was an intriguing scientific question, yet I couldn't find any scientists to discuss it with.

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this earth are somehow unique. Why should our sun be the only star in the universe to support intelligent life, when the number of stars is a 1 followed by 20 zeros?

Stars are born, grow old and die, and it now seems that the formation of planetary systems is part of this evolutionary process. You would expect to find planets around a star just as you find kittens around a cat or acorns around an oak. Suppose that only one star in 10 is circled by a planetary system that has life; that means that the number of life-supporting stars in the universe would be a 1 followed by 19 zeros.

We also know that some stars are many millions of years older than our sun, which means that life elsewhere in the universe may have evolved many millions of years beyond our present state. That could mean that other planets in other solar systems may have solved the problem of aging, which we are beginning to grapple with even now. If a life span reached 10,000 years, let us say, a space journey of 200 or 300 years would be relatively short. In that time it would be possible to get from some distant planetary systems to ours.

A highly advanced civilization, such as the one I am postulating, would naturally keep an eye on the progress of life elsewhere in its galaxy. Any signs of unusual scientific progress might be reason enough to send a reconnaissance vehicle to find out what was going on. It so happens that in recent years we have made a very important advance of this kind: the development of the use of nuclear energy.

This is still "science fiction," of course, but let me take the story a step further. Some skeptics who scoff at reported UFO sightings often ask why the "flying saucers" don't try to communicate with us. One answer might be: Why should they? We wouldn't try to communicate with a new species of kangaroo we might find in Australia; we would just observe the animals.

Is there any connection between the reported UFO sightings and the scientific probability of life elsewhere in our galaxy? I don't know. I find no compelling evidence for it, but I don't rule it out automatically.

The fourth possible explanation of UFO's is

that we are dealing with some kind of natural phenomenon that we as yet cannot explain or even conceive of. Think how our knowledge of the universe has changed in 100 years. In 1866 we not only knew nothing about nuclear energy, we didn't even know that the atom had a nucleus. Who would have dreamed 100 years ago that television would be invented? Who can say what startling facts we will learn about our world in the next 100 years?

All of these possibilities deserve serious consideration and now, at long last, they will get it. In October the Air Force announced that a thorough investigation of UFO's will be conducted at the University of Colorado by a team of distinguished scientists, headed by Dr. Edward Condon, the former director of the National Bureau of Standards.

I cannot help but feel a small sense of personal triumph and vindication. The night the appointment was announced, my wife and I went out and had a few drinks to celebrate.

I am particularly pleased that the Condon committee will have time to work into the problem because I cannot consider anyone qualified to speak authoritatively on the total UFO phenomenon unless he has read at least a few thousand original (not summarized) reports, and is thoroughly acquainted with the global nature of reported UFO sightings. The truly puzzling and outstanding UFO reports are few in number compared to the welter of poor reports.

Recently I had dinner with several members of the Condon committee. What a pleasure it was to sit down with men who were open-minded about UFO's, who did not look at me as though I were a Martian myself. For the first time other scientists, who apparently have been wondering all along, have openly talked about the reports. One leading scientist wrote me the other day: "For some time now I have been convinced of the reality of this phenomenon based on reports in the general news media. It has seemed to me that even with a heavy discount there is a core of reliable observations which we cannot shrug off. Twice in recent weeks I have stated my views on the subject in small conversational groups of re-

spectable, scholarly friends, and found that they were amazed that I should take these matters seriously. So I know that it took some courage for you to speak out."

I would like to suggest two more steps to help solve the UFO problem:

First, all of the valuable data that we have accumulated—good reports from all over the world—must be computerized so that we can rapidly compare new sightings with old and trace patterns of UFO behavior.

Second, we need good photographs of UFO's. Although the Air Force has probably spent less on UFO's so far than it has on wastebaskets, I realize that it is impractical to expect the service to set up a costly "flying-saucer" surveillance system across the country. When a UFO is spotted, the terrified witness usually picks up the phone at once and calls the local police, who have missed dozens of opportunities in the past to record the phenomena on film, I recommend that every police chief in the country make sure that at least one of his squad cars carries in its glove compartment a camera loaded with color film. The cameras, which could also be used for regular police work, might be furnished by civic or service groups. (I carry a camera in my briefcase at all times.)

Finally, I would like to emphasize my views on a controversial subject. During all of my years of association with the Air Force, I have never seen any evidence for the charge about UFO's most often leveled against the service: that there is deliberate cover-up of knowledge of space visitors to prevent the public from panicking. The entire history of the Air Force and the UFO's can be understood only if we realize that the Pentagon has never believed that UFO's could be anything novel, and it still doesn't. The working hypothesis of the Air Force has been that the stimulus behind every UFO report (apart from out-and-out hoaxes and a few hallucinations) is a misidentification of a conventional object or a natural phenomenon. It is just as simple as that.

Now, after a delay of 18 years, the Air Force and American science are about to try for the first time, really, to discover what, if anything, we can believe about "flying saucers." □

This strange shape was recorded over the New Mexican desert in 1957. While resembling a fast-moving cloud, it actually was motionless, according to the report of the photographer.

