

A COMMUNICATION CONCERNING

EDITOR'S NOTE: In SR's science sections for August 6, September 3, and October 1, John Lear, SR's science editor, discussed various aspects of the UFO controversy. Among several books from which he took excerpts was John Fuller's "Incident at Exeter." Mr. Fuller takes exception to Mr. Lear's articles in the following statement:

I HAVE BEEN most puzzled that John Lear has arrived at such a totally different conclusion regarding UFOs than I did in my book *Incident at Exeter*. I like to feel that we are both reasonably mature and objective in tracking down this most unusual phenomenon, even though neither of us has any academic degree in science. However, in three successive science sections of the *Saturday Review*, Mr. Lear has held forth on the subject with the most strange and hysterical intensity.

I was surprised not only by Mr. Lear's one-sided interpretation, but by his obvious inaccuracies. I am willing to overlook Mr. Lear's reference to the "St. James" version of the Bible, or his placing Mt. Rainier several hundred miles away from where it has stood since geological time. I can even overlook his totally incorrect captioning of a radar photograph, and his hopeless and digressory entanglement with a Biblical story which has nothing whatever to do with the increasingly well-documented UFO reports from all over the world.

But I cannot overlook the fact that Mr. Lear has written several thousand words on the subject with a startling lack of original research, and has drawn conclusions on the basis of established Air Force dogma which even the Air Force is beginning to question.

The entire premise of my book, *Incident at Exeter*, is based on these irrefutable, objective facts: 1) There are thousands of competent, reliable reports of UFOs. 2) Many of them are from highly qualified technical and scientific people such as airline pilots, Air Force pilots, weather observers, radar men, engineers, naval officers, scientists, and citizens whose intelligence, reliability, and capacity for observation are confirmed. 3) There are reports from nearly

every country in the world. 4) The Air Force receives only a fraction of these reports. A recent Gallup poll indicates that approximately 5,000,000 persons have seen what they believe to be UFOs. A recently announced Air Force total comes to slightly over 10,000. 5) The Air Force investigations have been inadequate. A major, desk sergeant, and clerk have been responsible for evaluating reports. 6) The Pentagon news releases based on the Wright-Patterson assessments of reports from local air bases are often inaccurate, if not deliberate distortions of the assessments made by local Air Force officers. 7) In recognizing its own inadequacies, the Air Force agreed in the summer of last year to turn a full-scale investigation over to the University of Colorado.

These are facts. They are not speculation. They can be documented in full. It is extremely difficult to understand why Mr. Lear chose to ignore them, and to set up straw men to knock down with his arguments. In his August 6 article he dwells at interminable length on a story about Ezekiel when it seems more logical for a science reporter to analyze today's facts. He talks about dusty library research in the field of mythology, instead of trying to find out at first hand what reliable observers are reporting. He attaches more importance to Polyhistor, Abydenus, and Appolodorus than he does to an airline pilot, a radar observer, or a group of thirty-five Oklahoma State Highway Patrolmen who kept a statewide teletype network chattering for two nights with reports. He frets and worries about a "flying saucer scare" and "invasion" when he could do better to promote a scientific inquiry. Scientific inquiry is not based on fear; it is based on insatiable curiosity.

MR. LEAR took considerable pains to point out that I represented an "extreme" in the "current UFO debate" by quoting from my book, *out of context*, a story involving a couple who went through a strange experience in the White Mountains some five years ago, and who kept the story quiet until it leaked out to a newspaper in the Boston area without their permission. I have since docu-

mented this story with the assistance of a distinguished neuro-psychiatrist and the cooperation of the couple. It stands as one of the most fascinating medical histories I've run across. I have reported it without embellishment or interpretation. In selecting this portion of *Incident at Exeter*, Mr. Lear took pains to remove my qualifying statements in such a way as to make me appear as an irresponsible reporter. While such a technique is often found in some portions of the field of journalism, it is hard to believe that Mr. Lear would do so. His action can only make me believe that he was insecure in his own arguments.

Mr. Lear also took great pains to point out that he had been given access to the Air Force reports at Wright-Patterson Field, suggesting that this privilege was not available to me. If Mr. Lear had read Air Force Regulation 200-2, he would have noted that the files are open to any qualified reporter, even myself, and were in fact offered to me very kindly by the Pentagon. But my work in Exeter was confined to direct, first-hand reports that I could collect from a lot of legwork, directly in the field of action. I was interested in taking one area as a microcosm of the story that was being repeated, and is still being repeated, throughout the world. In this sample, test-tube area—which is really all a single reporter can cover in any reasonable time—I received all the material I needed from the Air Force. Ironically, the official reports from the Pease Air Force Base in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, were diametrically opposed to the news released on the case by the Pentagon.

The Air Force statistics that Mr. Lear fondly quoted in his first article are stale press handouts that any reporter with energy to investigate would find inaccurate and incomplete. In Exeter alone, I cross-examined over sixty people who reported UFOs who were of reasonable intelligence, sober character, and many of whom were sophisticated enough to tell the difference between a Boeing 707, a B-52, or a KC-97 tanker. Only a fraction of these was reported to the Air Force. I not only checked the story with local editors, police, Coast Guard, and military men in a circle twenty miles

THE UFOs



around Exeter, but discarded dozens of reports which were too flimsy to stand up under stiff cross-examination. The most startling thing I found in talking off the record with local Air Force men was their sharp disagreement with the information the Air Force was officially releasing. From the official press releases it appears that the Air Force hasn't been listening to its own personnel. In the Exeter police case, the Base Disaster Control Officer at Pease Air Force Base wrote in his official report:

At this time have been unable to arrive at a probable cause of this sighting. The three observers seem to be stable, reliable persons, especially the two patrolmen. I viewed the area and found nothing in the area that could be the probable cause. Pease AFB had five B-47 aircraft flying in the area during this period, but do not believe they had any connection with the sighting.

A few days after this report was filed with Wright-Patterson, the Pentagon news release to the local papers in the area ascribed the sighting to "high-altitude Strategic Air Command exercise" and "twinkling stars and planets." Later, when the Exeter police officers pointed out in two letters that Wright-Patterson had placed the sighting at an entirely different time and date from the police incident, the Pentagon finally apologized in writing to the policemen, but not until after the policemen had been, in effect, branded as either liars or total incompetents in the local press.

It is this kind of attitude that is most damaging to competent and sincere people when they report sightings or make objective investigations of them. Mr. Lear, for instance, takes no cognizance in his articles of the fact that I weighed, analyzed, studied, and judged the people who were giving me reports, and did not accept any testimony at face value. I spent as much time checking the character and quality of the person giving the story as I did on the story itself. As a reporter, the last thing in the world I wanted was to be taken in.

There is fortunately a measure of increasing respect among some segments of the scientific field which may make intelligent study of the subject a reality.

Dr. Edward Condon, head of the new program sponsored by the Air Force at the University of Colorado, has publicly urged people to report their UFO sightings, instead of hiding them as many people have done under former Air Force ridicule.

AMONG other scientists is the scientific advisor to the Air Force for the past eighteen years, and chairman of the Department of Astronomy at Northwestern, Dr. J. Allen Hynek. Mr. Lear, in his apparent effort to discredit anyone who had the temerity to explore the UFO subject with an open mind, took great pains to avoid any of Dr. Hynek's recent statements. These have been made publicly with the utmost restraint and discretion, and in the spirit of straightforward scientific inquiry.

"When I started to investigate this phenomenon in 1948," Dr. Hynek told an audience of scientists, engineers, and technicians last spring, "I thought the whole thing would go up in smoke, like eating goldfish or seeing how many students could be jammed into a phone booth. But the phenomenon has stayed with us—and more than that—there are far more persons of stature and competence who are reporting UFOs with extremely articulate descriptions. To those who don't know the background—which you're not likely to get from the press—these conclusions of mine might sound very strange, but I have given them long thought."

As official Air Force scientific consultant on UFOs, Dr. Hynek has been able to study in depth and on location far more official UFO reports than either John Lear or I could ever have the time or opportunity to study. In addition to his astronomy chair at Northwestern, he was in charge of the optical satellite tracking program of the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory, and scientific director of the U. S. Air Force balloon astronomy project known as *Stargazer*. I am struck by the most dramatic contrast between his attitude and that of Mr. Lear.

In the same talk, Dr. Hynek continued: "Unidentified flying objects demand serious and immediate scientific

attention. I say this at the start so that you are not misled by the kooks, the nuts, and the gullible who have made this subject so difficult to explore rationally. UFOs are a real puzzle. The myth is *not* put to rest. And the scientific fraternity must now take cognizance of them. We can no longer dismiss the subject."

In a letter to *Science*, the highly reputable magazine of that subject, Dr. Hynek points out that a chief reason why many scientists have not taken a serious look at UFOs is because of many misconceptions about the reports and the people who make them. (He is concerned here only with the puzzling reports, not those which are easily ascribed to balloons, satellites, meteors, and other known phenomena. In any sensible investigation of the objects, these are automatically discarded.) Among the common *misconceptions* he includes are those which assume that only UFO "buffs" make reports; that UFOs are reported only by unreliable, unstable people; that they are never reported by scientifically trained people; that they are never seen at close range; that they are generated by publicity.

He concludes his statement with: "I cannot dismiss the UFO phenomenon with a shrug. I have begun to feel that there is a tendency in the twentieth century science to forget that there will be a twenty-first century science, and indeed, a thirtieth century science, from which vantage points our knowledge of the universe may appear quite different than it does to us. We suffer, perhaps from temporal provincialism, a form of arrogance that has always irritated posterity."

OTHER scientists are also taking a bolder stand. Among them is Dr. James E. McDonald, senior physicist of the Institute of Atmospheric Physics and professor of meteorology at the University of Arizona. In a talk given to the District of Columbia Chapter of the American Meteorological Society in October, Dr. McDonald points out that although atmospheric phenomena such as ball lightning, scintillation parhelia, anomalous radar propagation, and others have been invoked to account for many UFO re-



ports, such explanations have been seriously misapplied.

"Careful scrutiny of hundreds of the better UFO reports from quite credible observers," he stated in his talk, "reveals that not only is it impossible to explain them away in terms of atmospheric physics, but also the other officially proposed categories of geophysical, astronomical, technological, and psychological hypotheses fail to encompass the UFO phenomena."

Dr. McDonald then went on in his talk to conclude that "the least unsatisfactory hypothesis is that UFOs are of extraterrestrial nature, and that UFOs are probably extraterrestrial vehicles engaged in something of the nature of a reconnaissance operation."

"My study of the official Air Force investigation," he said, "leads me to describe it as *completely superficial*. It has, for the past dozen years, been carried out on a very low level of scientific competence. . . . Officially released "explanations" of important UFO sightings have often been almost absurdly erroneous."

In the issue of October 1, Mr. Lear continues with his "first-hand" research, and he solves the entire UFO puzzle by quoting over 400 words of Philip Klass, an editor of *Aviation Week*, theorizing that some of the UFO sightings are the result of ball lightning. (Mr. Lear is fond of quotations from other sources. In his August 6 article, he included nearly two columns of quotations from the "St. James" version of the Bible; nearly two and a half columns from Carl Sagan; half a column from an Air Force report; nearly five full columns from my book, *Incident at Exeter*, without permission and with my qualifying statements removed; over half a column of shopworn Air Force statistics; and nearly three full pages of Professor Carl Sagan's book, *Intelligent Life in the Universe*, as a supplement to his article. In his article of September 3, Mr. Lear includes nearly six columns of quotations from a CIA report. His October 1 article is practically a paraphrase, plus quotations, from Mr. Klass's *Aviation Week* report.)

Mr. Klass's first article in *Aviation Week* is interesting, fair, and provocative. (His second article, unfortunately, reveals bias instead of open-minded inquiry.) In Mr. Lear's hands, it becomes exactly the opposite. He fails to acknowledge Mr. Klass's statement that his theory, if true, would apply to only a portion of UFO reports; fails to acknowledge the hundreds of persistent, well-qualified reports that refer to *structured crafts*, as opposed to globs of light; fails to acknowledge the hundreds of competent daytime observations of shiny metal structure; fails to acknowledge the many

unpublished Air Force radar sightings, supported by visual sightings; fails to acknowledge that the Exeter reports that I was able to delineate first hand were by no means confined to the power lines; fails to acknowledge that Klass has yet to establish that ball lightning or plasma can assume a form some 100 feet in diameter, and remain visible at both high and low altitudes for as long as fifteen minutes to an hour or more; fails to acknowledge that in *Incident at Exeter* I questioned the engineers at the local power company about any such phenomena, but ruled out this possibility because of prevalence of reliable and continuing reports of structured crafts in both daylight and nighttime sightings. One well-known scientist commented that the acceptance of Mr. Klass's theory would require more changes in existing knowledge than in the acceptance of the extraterrestrial theory.

Beyond that, Mr. Lear has distorted my observations and conclusions in such a way as to give me serious doubts that he took the time to read my book intelligently. In his August article, Mr. Lear informs his readers that I wrote that "sixty people claim to have witnessed the same landing." This is such a distortion that it leaves me amazed. My book plainly states that the police sighting on September 3, 1965, was witnessed by *five* people; the remainder of the sightings cover a period from July 1965 to November 1965—at various times and places. How is anyone to have confidence in anything Mr. Lear says when he misinterprets obviously stated material so badly?

Mr. Lear further states in his article of October 1: "The only disagreements with Fuller expressed in these pages was a difference over two of Fuller's conclusions: 1) That UFOs are vehicles from the planets of other stars, intelligently guided to earth and here refueled by electric power lines; and 2) that the U.S. Air Force is suppressing knowledge of these vehicles."

Again, Mr. Lear has demonstrated a strange incapacity to read his information correctly. First, I *never* stated in my book that UFOs are vehicles from outer space. I said this was *one* theory of several; that any theory examined in the light of the growing evidence was faulty; that the interplanetary theory seemed to be the one with the least holes in it. Secondly, I never stated or implied that UFOs "refueled" from power lines. I quoted some people as *speculating* about this. Third, I did not emphasize that the Air Force was "suppressing" knowledge of "these vehicles." I pointed out that the official Air Force releases tended to discount any report coming in from any

observer, and that these releases tended to discredit intelligent and sincere people who reported UFOs.

Mr. Lear goes on to say: "The burden of proof rests on those who say that the text of *Incident at Exeter* includes qualifying statements prefatory to the story of Mr. Barney Hill and his wife, Betty, and their experience with a UFO, which was excerpted in SR. The story of the Hills begins near the bottom of page 90 of the book, with no more warning or introduction than the word 'meanwhile.'" (Even in pointing this out, Mr. Lear makes a mistake. It is page 190.)

Mr. Lear need not look far for the burden of proof. He removed from *within* this section the following material:

1) My statement that the reason for including the Hill material in the Exeter book was to determine regional interest in the subject through the size of the turnout for the meeting at which the Hills spoke (page 191, paragraph two).

2) The clearly stated major motivating sentence: "These two factors prompted me to cover the meeting: possible Air Force connection with it, and an indirect Gallup-type poll as to general public interest" (page 191, paragraph three).

3) My statement that the case could not be explored fully without far more research time than I had available at the time (page 192, top of page).

4) My statement: "I resolved to confine myself to the church meeting *and to exploring any possible Air Force interest in it, official or unofficial*" (Mr. Lear omitted the italicized portion on page 193, paragraph two).

5) My complete analysis of the large crowd which attended the meeting, which supported my feeling that UFO sightings were widespread in the area (pages 219 and 220).

6) The only motivating reason that prompted the Hills to speak at the meeting: "Mr. and Mrs. Hill, who were to talk about their traumatic experience with a UFO some four years previously, were anxious to counteract some of the sensationalism of the New England press (page 220, paragraph two).

As a reporter, the entire objective of the small inquiry I have made into the UFO subject is to urge an open-minded scientific inquiry into a phenomenon that has accumulated enough evidence (though not proof) to warrant it. I have jumped to no other conclusions.

I regret that this statement will mark the end of a decade of my association with *Saturday Review*, but it brings to a head an unbridgable gap and disagreement.

—JOHN G. FULLER.

A REPLY

I FEEL it important to make clear at the outset that I was in no way involved in the editorial decision to discontinue Mr. Fuller's column. That decision had been made for reasons other than the UFO controversy, and in no way reflected on Mr. Fuller's integrity or ability.

It is easier to straighten out this misconception than it is to clarify the many other mistaken notions in Mr. Fuller's communication. For example, I don't know why he should accuse me of ignoring the seven "facts" recited in his fourth paragraph; I discussed all seven. I don't know why he should say I fear a flying saucer invasion; I have explicitly said I don't think such an invasion is likely.

Above all, why should there be surprise over my disagreement with the conclusions he reached in his book, *Incident at Exeter*? Other reputable science writers did not accept his conclusions, either. Among them was Walter Sullivan, science editor of *The New York Times*, who called some of the book's contents "preposterous."

In absence of a better explanation, I must suppose that Mr. Fuller's attitude toward me is related to the fact that, through a series of accidents, I failed to obtain explicit permission to publish the excerpt from his book, *Incident at Exeter*. A copy of the book had been sent to me by a representative of the book publisher, who had orally invited me to "do something with it." This, I think, is an extenuating circumstance but does not justify my lapse in diligence, for which I apologize.

On this account he may feel free to make misstatements about me. For instance, he berates me for failing to promote scientific investigation of UFOs. Actually, I was the first editor of a general magazine to publish a reasonable scientific explanation for UFOs. The article appeared in *SR*'s issue of September 5, 1959, under the byline of Donald Robey, a physicist on the staff of General Dynamics-Convair in San Diego, California.

Mr. Fuller also finds fault with my failure to tape-record eyewitness accounts of UFOs. From my point of view, such an exercise would have been a waste of time. Scores of UFO sightings were on record long before Mr. Fuller first became interested in the subject. These records had fired a furious debate within the United States Air Force for many years, and that debate had finally cul-

minated in an Air Force decision to seek independent scholarly study of UFOs before Mr. Fuller's book appeared in print.

Mr. Fuller complains that I rely on quotations. Of course I do. So does he. A large part of his book is made up of quotations. The real reason for his annoyance with me seems to be that I did not quote him more extensively and other sources less.

Perhaps I should have quoted him at greater length in order to document the extremity of his position in the UFO controversy. For example, on page 249 of *Incident at Exeter*, "in thinking back over the research" that went into that book, Mr. Fuller began to list "the highlights that stand out on those points detailed in this book that are almost irrefutable." The list contained twelve items, each set off by an identifying dash, and was immediately followed, near the bottom of page 250, by the statement of conclusions below:

The most logical, but still unprovable explanation is that the Unidentified Flying Objects are interplanetary spaceships under intelligent control. NICAP [National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena] and others have been supporting this hypothesis for years. Its credibility, however, has suffered by the support of the crackpot fringe. In spite of this, the hypothesis remains stronger than any other theory advanced.

Why is the hypothesis of interplanetary vehicles stronger than any other explanation for UFOs?

Mr. Fuller does not tell us.

I have spoken to several scientists who share Mr. Fuller's preference for the interplanetary hypothesis. They say they arrived at the hypothesis through a process of elimination. Since other explanations for the UFOs don't suffice for these men, only the interplanetary hypothesis is left.

The most puzzling aspect of this approach to the UFO problem is that the descriptions of UFOs never fit or even approximate description of the vehicles we have sent to the moon and to Mars. Those who sight UFOs invariably report seeing the kinds of shapes we have found efficient for travel within earth's atmosphere.

I do not know where Mr. Fuller got the idea that my writings on UFOs attack his credibility as a reporter. He cites no words of mine to support this charge;



—All sketches by Doug Anderson.

he could not, for I have published none. But what are we to think of his own account of why he decided to include in *Incident at Exeter* the story of two people (Betty and Barney Hill) who, while under therapeutic hypnosis, told a psychiatrist they had been abducted by humanoid crewmen of a flying saucer?

This is the story I excerpted from *Incident at Exeter* and published without his permission. He says I took the story out of context and distorted it. He says I should have included in the excerpt his explanation that he hadn't originally intended to publish the story in the book because there wasn't time to research the story thoroughly, but that he finally did publish it because it showed the intensity of local interest in UFOs and also possibly showed Air Force involvement in the public telling of the story by the Hills in a New England church.

I find a flat contradiction here. Mr. Fuller insists he published the story of the Hills in *Incident at Exeter* before researching the story carefully. At the same time, he insists that *Incident at Exeter* was a scrupulously documented book throughout. Both statements cannot be true.

MR. Fuller's accusation that I misrepresented him is especially confusing to me because, after publishing the flying saucer abduction story in brief in *Incident at Exeter*, he rewrote the same story to full book length (without changing any major detail given in *Incident at Exeter*) and published it again as a separate volume under a new title: *The Interrupted Journey: Two Lost Hours Aboard a Flying Saucer*. His concluding sentence in the book-length version was a quotation from Tennyson: "Maybe wildest dreams are but the needful preludes of the truth."

I ask *SR* readers to reread what I have written about UFOs, compare it to what Mr. Fuller says I have written, read *Incident at Exeter*, compare its contents to what Mr. Fuller says its contents are, read the text of the contract under which the University of Colorado is conducting an independent scientific study of UFOs for the U.S. Air Force [*SR*, Dec. 3, 1966], and then decide for themselves whether my behavior has been either strange or hysterical. —JOHN LEAR.

