



MUFON

Mutual UFO Network

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ARIZONA CHAPTER

Volume 5 / Issue 2

The Truth is Out There . . .

FEBRUARY PROGRAM: Michael Hesemann's Video: "UFOs: Secrets of the Black World"

MEETING DATE: Wednesday, February 28, 1996 • MEETING TIME: 7:30 p.m. SHARP

LOCATION: 5636 E. McDowell Road - National Guard Armory

(East of 52nd St. on McDowell; then North on Bushmaster Blvd. into Armory)

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520/726-0570

Mary Hart
Newsletter Producer

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

This month's program, the excellent video program "UFOs: Secrets of the Black World" concerning Area 51, was produced by German researcher Michael Hesemann, and I know it will be of interest to everyone.

The first Section Directors' meeting for 1996 was recently held in Gila Bend, Arizona. This gives the various Section Directors from around the state the chance to talk over MUFON-AZ plans and also to pass information along in person. It is also a chance for all concerned to meet

each other on a one-to-one basis. Among those attending were Asst. State Director Paul Ankney, Maricopa County Section Director "Jim" Dimitri Ossipov, Pima County Section Director June Scherrer, Yuma County Section Director (now resigned) Gloria Roche, and Arizona Field Investigator Trainer Richard Motzer.

I am sorry to announce that Gloria Roche will not be able to continue as Yuma County's Section Director. Doris Barley has graciously consented to fill in until another Section Director for Yuma County can be found.

Several members have wondered if we are having another State meeting this year. Things have been fairly busy, and the idea of another State meeting was on the back burner. However, that doesn't mean something can't be organized before the really hot weather comes along. I am open for suggestions and ideas. If you are aware of someone you thing might make an interesting speaker at such a meeting, please let Paul or me know. If we want to do something before summer, we need to get started now!

The area up in Sedona seems to be of great interest to UFO buffs. We have needed someone up there to get something organized, and I have spoken with several members in the Sedona/Flagstaff area, but nothing has happened. I received a phone call from one of our active members in the part of the state expressing interest in getting a chapter going up in that area, so perhaps by next

month I will be in the position to appoint someone in that part of the state.

A special showing of Unsolved Mysteries Sunday, February 18, retold the story of Lonnie Zamora, a New Mexico patrolman, who witnessed a UFO landing near White Sands Proving Grounds around 1965.

Art Bell interviewed Budd Hopkins on Monday, February 19 regarding the upcoming NOVA special in which Budd claims he is set up by NOVA in an attempt to discredit the entire abduction scenario, just as NOVA has done to the topic of UFOs.

Sunday, February 18, Art featured Ray Fowler, author and UFO researcher. Discussion involved the possible connection between OBO (out-of-body experiences) and UFO abductions. Interesting show.

Hope to see many of you at the Painted Rock State Park Outing (described elsewhere in the Newsletter).

Tom Taylor
State Director

OUTING AT PAINTED ROCK STATE PARK

Mark your calendars! Saturday March 30, MUFON-AZ will sponso an outing to Painted Rock State Park located west of Gila Bend, Arizona. The park consists of one of th

highest concentrations of petroglyphs found in Arizona. There are ramadas and picnic tables at the park.

To get to Painted Rock State Park, go north on Exit 102 from Interstate 8. That paved road turns to a gravel, well-graded road just a few miles south of Painted Rock Dam. For those who want to carpool or caravan: For those in the east valley, we will meet at Smitty's on the northwest corner of Mill Avenue and Southern in Tempe (in the parking lot next to the Exxon station) and leave promptly at 9:00 a.m. For those in the west valley, we will meet at McDonald's on the southwest corner of 51st Avenue just north of I-10 (take the 51st Ave. exit north and you'll quickly see the McDonald's).

Bring your own food and drink, a camera to record the amazing petroglyphs, and binoculars or telescopes if desired. It's a great chance to socialize and meet other MUFON-AZ members from other parts of the state and explore some very interesting country.

Hope to see you there!

MEDIA WATCH by Tom Taylor

In the interest of keeping the UFO topic before the public, the following is a list of programs on the subject recently aired via television, radio and newspaper in recent weeks. We will attempt to list programs ahead of time whenever possible; unfortunately, we are often not notified of programs until it is too late to publish them in the Newsletter in time for members to view, hear or read them. In the case of TV and radio programs, ask at MUFON meetings to see if anyone is aware of someone who may have taped them to share.

Always be sure to check current TV listings before viewing!

The UFO topic continues in the news. Bob Dean, former Pima County Section Directory, was featured on one of the segments on Sightings recently. He spoke about his military experience and his desire to have information released by the government.

If you watched the Super Bowl, then you probably saw the trailer for the new UFO film "Independence Day" premiering July 3rd. Looks like it might be an exciting new film. On February 27 at 8:00 p.m. (check local listings to verify) on Channel 8 in the

Phoenix Metro area, a special on "abductions" will be aired.

The local CBS station, Channel 5, did quite a bit of promotion on Area 51. For all the promotion they did, it was very disappointing. If you are really interested in Area 51, then you don't want to miss the video on Area 51 at this month's meeting.

Keep your eyes peeled for an article coming out soon in the Arizona Republic (in fact, it may be out by the time you read this) on Remote Viewing. This was also one of the topics of "Sightings" February 17th. Very interesting concept.

A fax and a few phone calls on Art Bell's "Coast to Coast" program, heard during the week at midnight, mentioned a UFO sighting in the Mexico City area. Richard Motzer tuned his satellite dish to Mexico City TV and caught the story on the news and that footage will be presented at this month's meeting.

On February 25, NBC will present a special "The Mysterious Origins of Man," hosted by Charlton Heston.

The March issue of Fate magazine has an interesting article by John Keel, "How to Build a Flying Saucer Detector." Similar plans once appeared in a Motorola monthly newsletter back in the early '70s. If anyone wants a copy of this article, let me know.

Paul Harvey recently proclaimed crop circles were due to a "natural phenomenon." Come on, Paul!

WEEKLY PROGRAMS:

DREAMLAND - KFYI Radio, 910 AM, Sunday evenings, 8:00 p.m. - Art Bell hosts this interesting radio program. The program is aired on the following stations in other cities in Arizona: Globe: 1240 AM; Safford: 1230 AM; Tucson: 1400 AM; Kingman: 1230 AM; and Flagstaff: 600 AM.

UFO AZ/UFO TALKS - Channel 22, Dimension Cable, Monday and Tuesday at 9:00 a.m. Ted, Peggy and Jim co-host this continuing series featuring interesting guests and topics related to all aspects of the UFO experience. Related radio program in the Tucson area on KTUC, 1400 AM, 10:00 p.m. Sundays (after "Dreamland").

The Extraordinary - Monday MORNING, 12:30 - 1:30 a.m. (set your VCRs), Channel 15.

Encounters - Mondays at 7:00 p.m., Channel 10.

Unsolved Mysteries - Fridays at 7:00 p.m., Channel 12.

X Files - Fridays at 8:00 p.m. Channel 10.

Sightings - Saturdays and Sundays at 10:30 p.m., Channel 15.

Classified Ads

Don't forget that we can advertise for you in the newsletter!! Up to three-line ads are \$5.00; business-card sized ads are \$10 (we can reproduce your business card as the ad). Larger ads -- see Tom Taylor for price. Submit your ad and payment by the first of the month to have it appear in that month's newsletter issue.

ARTICLE SUBMISSION

We're getting some great articles and book reviews written by our members. If you write your articles on a computer, it saves Mary (who types the Newsletter) a lot of time if you can submit your articles on diskette. However, you need to save your articles in WordPerfect 5.1 format, which is the software she uses. If you cannot do so, please save your document in the ASCII format ("common denominator" text for all software programs) so she can access it to put it in the Newsletter without having to retype it.

Also, if you can't put your articles on diskette to submit them, you can fax your typed articles to Mary at 957-7410 or 852-3688. Please put "for Mary Hart" on your cover sheet. Thanks.

Calendar

February 24 - Saturday - Pima County MUFON-AZ meeting, Wilmot Library in Tucson, 1-4:30 p.m. Bill Hamilton is the tentative speaker. Call June for info at 520/326-0078.

March 10 - Sunday - Yuma County MUFON-AZ meeting, Desert Lakes Clubhouse in Yuma, 1:00 p.m. Call Doris Barley for details at 520/726-0570.

March 16 - Skywatch. Meet at 6:30 p.m. at McDonald's on 51st Ave. just north of I-10. We will go out to Sun Valley Parkway and perhaps the newly described comet,

Hyakutaki, which was discovered a few weeks ago in Japan, will be visible. Bring binoculars and telescopes if you have them. Phone Paul Ankney for additional info at 840-1379.

March 30 - Saturday - Pima County MUFON-AZ meeting, Wilmot Library in Tucson, 1-4:30 p.m. Call June for info at 520/326-0078.

March 30 - Saturday - Painted Rock State Park outing - see details elsewhere in this Newsletter.

April 6 - Saturday - UFO Update Picnic, El Dorado Park, Scottsdale (Ramada East #1), Granada & 77th St. in Scottsdale. Starts at 11 a.m. Call 602/494-9279 for further info.

April 12-14 - 8th Annual Ozark UFO Conference. For details, write Ozark UFO Conference, #2 Caney Valley Drive, Plumeville, AR 72127-8725 or call 501/354-2558.

May 3-5 - Greenville, South Carolina 2nd Annual UFO Research Conference. For details, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to Sharron Kluge, 102 Woodridge Circle, Greenville SC 29607 or call 864/675-9238.

CROP CIRCLE CALENDARS

Crop Circle Calendars that were available at the meeting featuring Ron Russell are for sale at \$15.00 each. Call Quila at 255-0758 for details.

UFOs SIGHTED NEAR DOUGLAS & BISBEE

At least three people claim they have seen UFOs in the skies near Douglas and Bisbee in the past week. And an official with the National UFO Reporting Center in Seattle, Washington, says they are not the only ones.

Aviation officials say they haven't seen anything that could explain the reports.

Heather Castner, a 17-year-old Douglas High School student, and her grandmother, Earline Edinger, say they saw a strange cluster of lights in the sky near Douglas about 9:30 p.m. on September 14.

Castner said they were driving home from church north on Leslie Canyon Road at the Cochise County Fairgrounds when she first saw what she thought was a cluster of

helicopters or airplanes flying in the distance.

"I remember thinking that they couldn't possibly fly so close together," she said.

That's when Castner realized the lights were coming from a single object that had a pair of "very bright" lights alternating on and off at the top. Castner said she tried but could not see the object's body.

"It was like totally invincible except for the lights," she said.

"I'd never seen any aircraft like that," Edinger said. "It was hard to pay attention because I was driving, but I remember seeing these extremely bright lights."

Retired Bisbee shoe store owner John Ortega said he also thought he was watching a group of helicopters when he saw lights over the Mule Mountains about 1:30 p.m. Tuesday while driving north on Naco Highway near the junction with Highway 92.

"It was a very bright light in the shape of a thick, heavy pancake," Ortega said. "I remember thinking how bright it was for the middle of the day."

Ortega said he didn't think much of the object, occasionally looking at it as he drove. "Then I looked up and the next thing I knew it went zip and was gone," he said. "Almost instantaneously it just disappeared."

That night, Ortega said he saw a strange cluster of lights as he looked north in the sky from the front porch of his Manzanita Street home off Naco Highway. Ortega said he and his wife often sit out to watch satellites that pass in the eastern sky around 10 p.m.

"I thought it was a plane or something, but it didn't move, so I thought maybe it was a star," Ortega said.

Libby Army Airfield officials said no military aircraft taking off from Fort Huachuca flew more than 15 miles from the post on the dates the UFOs were sighted.

"That doesn't even put them close to where the reports were made," said Bill Lopez, a post spokesman.

TRW's unmanned aerial vehicle flight tests in Douglas were also grounded at that time, Lopez said.

Joint Task Force 6, the Army support group for drug fighting, also has aircraft in southeastern Arizona at times. But officials could not be reached for comment Friday.

Cochise County Sheriff's Office spokeswoman Carol Capas said Sheriff John Pintek is usually notified when task force air operations are in the area.

"Normally they notify us, but there have been times when they didn't. But as far as I know, there were no task force operations [at the time of the UFO sightings,] Capas said.

UFO sightings in the Southwest have inundated the Seattle-based National UFO Reporting Center, said its director, Peter Davenport. Davenport said there has been an increase in UFO sightings in the Southwest since July 1994.

In August, a woman driving with her granddaughter near the Magma copper mine in Superior described seeing an object in the sky similar to what Ortega, Castner and Edinger reported, Davenport said.

"We are utterly flabbergasted by the lack of coverage by the press," he said.

Ortega said what he saw has changed his opinions about unearthly objects.

"I'm the kind of person who doesn't believe in that sort of thing. But since this happened it's made me think maybe there's something to it," he said.

Herald/Review

SEVERAL UFO SIGHTINGS IN (BISBEE) AREA REPORTED RECENTLY

Several sightings of UFOs have been reported in the last month in Naco and Douglas.

Local tree and roof man Dan Oldfield spotted one September 30.

"I had been doing some yard work when a friend stopped by. We sat outside for awhile, talking until after sundown," Oldfield said. "Then I saw what looked like a green roman candle, moving very low, very fast, and it had a tail. My friend saw it, too."

He added that the weird part was the color, the size and the angle and the fact that there were sparks

coming from it. Whatever it was that Oldfield saw occurred at about 6:30 or 7:00 p.m. He lives off Highway 80 several miles east of Bisbee.

Scott Gidney, an avionics student at Cochise College, said he saw something strange about a month ago.

"It lasted two or three seconds. By the time I could say to my buddy, 'Hey, did you see that?' it was gone," Gidney said. "The strangest part, though, is that it came back about five minutes later and did the same thing.

"It looked several times bigger than a star, and it appears to be about a half mile or a mile away, not in the atmosphere, but in the sky. First it's there and then, boom, it's gone. At first I thought somebody was shooting something off. It must have been about 9:30 or 10 at night."

Godney lives between Bisbee and Cochise College off Highway 80.

Oldfield and Gidney say the object goes east to west but does not go clear across the sky, just a small portion. They agree that it has a short tail, but it seems to be moving sideways with the tail hanging down from the object.

A friend of Gidney's saw the object about September 30 and described it the same way Gidney saw it.

John Ortega, a Bisbee resident who lives near Naco, also saw something about a month ago, as did two Douglas women, Earline Edinger and her granddaughter, Heather Castner, a Douglas High School student.

Karen Herberman
The Bisbee Observer

• DID THE STS-73 ASTRONAUTS SEE A UFO?

According to the November 1995 issue of The UFO Enigma, published by the UFO Study Group of Greater St. Louis, a female astronaut aboard the STS-73 flight of the Space Shuttle Columbia said it happened. UFOSG member Bob Soetebier obtained the information from the computer networks.

STS-73 had two female astronauts aboard -- Kathryn Thornton (Payload Commander) and Catherine Coleman (Mission

Specialist 1). The amateur radio operator credited with taping the downlink feed from Columbia said that on October 22, 1995 at 2:06 a.m. a female astronaut said these exact words: "We have an Unidentified Flying Object." For 10 - 15 minutes nothing else was said. When something was finally said, it was not about the UFO. Did the Columbia crew see a UFO and switch to a secure downlink to discuss it? Or was this just a joke? I doubt that we will ever see photos or videotape of the event; so all we can do is speculate about this event as we have all the other astronaut reports in the past.

"UFO Potpourri"
John Schuessler
December 1995

COMPELLING EVIDENCE

It was reported on the computer network on October 28, 1995, that two compelling pieces of evidence were shown at the Dialogue With The Universe Conference in Dusseldorf.

The first was a videotape of Astronaut Gordon Cooper saying that he knew for a fact that a UFO landed at an airbase where he was stationed, was filmed landing, and that he had been the person who had sent the film and documents to Washington, D.C. If true, this is one piece of filmed evidence that the U.S. government could easily produce for public disclosure. Sufficient time has lapsed for automatic security classification downgrading.

The second was a film shown by Mr. Bongiovanni, the Italian stigmatic, which shows a crashed disc UFO on a 40-foot military flatbed truck. It also shows a big hanger, then shows something (perhaps the propulsion system) being hoisted by chains. It was claimed that the film had come from Wright Patterson AFB and shows a crashed UFO recovered in 1947. If true, this film could be a bigger bombshell than the Santilli films.

This material, when considered along with the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of gun camera films of UFOs taken by military pilots during and since World War II, is a part of a vast and growing reservoir of UFO information that should be made public.

UFO Potpourri
December 1995

STARGATE CONFERENCE

In last month's newsletter you may have read of the foreign objects removed from two individuals from Houston. These individuals were flown, free of charge, to Ventura, California where a California surgeon operated on them (also free of charge). The entire process was videotaped, and all witnesses maintained legal "chain-of-evidence" procedures. There was a very big stir of excitement and interest when this same surgeon came forward at the Stargate Conference in Tucson last month! He presented enlarged photos and a video of the procedure and the objects removed. We were able to read first hand the pathology laboratory reports. Preliminary analysis of the tough membrane surrounding these tiny, shiny black objects showed constituents of natural body ingredients not found together in our bodies. This tissue apparently was able to leach oxygen from surrounding tissues to support this membrane, which was able to contain the foreign bodies without any rejection or reaction response or even inflammation in the body. Some proprioceptive nerve cells were discovered, which could enable these tiny objects to signal the brain or other organs in the body.

Continuing to maintain anonymity, this surgeon then photographed the objects and turned them over to the Houston researcher who had been witnessing the entire procedure. This researcher accompanied both of the individuals back to Texas, and he went on to accompany the objects themselves to the university laboratories where they are undergoing spectrographic and other analytical diagnostic tests.

As if this were not excitement enough, two other experiencers brought "implants" that had been removed (or had fallen) from their own bodies. Although they never left the possession of the experiencers, we were able to examine them microscopically and study greatly enlarged photos. The implants appeared to be of a ceramic substance and looked like infinitesimal-sized micro chops. They came from the eye and nose area.

A sense of wonder surrounded this entire conference as geologists, astrophysicists, astronomers and other researchers shared their cutting-edge information with us. We developed a model to teach "crisis Intervention" de-briefing techniques to those who come in contact with individuals stunned or

traumatized by their contact with non-human intelligences. This conference was a "first" in many ways, and I would encourage you to look for further training resources from STARGATE.

STARGATE has been founded as an educational and research organization by Bob Dean and his wife Cecilia. Many have heard them speak and share their videos and documentation at UFO conferences. Bob and Cecilia Dean can be reached through STARGATE INTERNATIONAL, 2732 S. Gwain Place, Tucson, AZ 85713.

Believe me, nothing in my experience matched this gathering when this surgeon, a man I have known personally from my home town in California, came forward with his highly credible account. I trust and respect this man's integrity and so was overwhelmed and impressed with the data on these "implants." I was also impressed with the professionalism and dedication of STARGATE INTERNATIONAL and the teaching team that they assembled. I hope you will consider attendance at any future workshops they may present. (Although the \$295 price tag was rather steep, they plan to attempt a reduction in costs in order to present this material to a wider audience).

A STAR NATION/UFO Conference on the Yankton Indian Reservation (Lakota/Dakota Sioux) will be held June 12 - 18 in South Dakota, and Bob Dean is scheduled to speak there as well. (Call Ruth at 837-0446 for data on the Conference.) If it is any match for this past Conference, you can bet that I will be there! The STAR NATION, as some tribes of the Native Americans refer to themselves, will be passing on teachings and recent knowledge from their Council of Elders about the "Star People" (some refer to them as "aliens") and many renowned UFO researchers (Richard Boyla, Leo Sprinkle, Robert Morning Sky and many others) will attend and speak. (This Conference has set a \$100 fee which is deductible if "donated" to the Indian Community, I am told.)

STARGATE has also initiated something BIG -- a coalition for "Honesty in Government." This is to give Congressional impetus to open hearings and full disclosure of Government information, and they are scheduling further conferences to disclose data held by the few for the benefit of the many.

Again, although there are few definitive answers given, this flood of well-documented information begins to led credibility to this highly incredible field of research.

Ruth McKinley-Hover
MUFON-AZ

(NOTE: Ruth McKinley-Hover, ACSW Ph.D., is a practicing psychotherapist in Fountain Hills, Arizona and is a researcher for the Harvard University Medical School in a Program for Extraordinary Experience Research (PEER) founded by Dr. John Mack. Ruth has been a member of MUFON-AZ for two years and is a trained MUFON Field Investigator. Information regarding her "Experiencers' Support Group" may be obtained by calling her at (602) 837-0446.

INCIDENT ON THE MOUNT

The year was 1976. Pilot Mound, a small midwestern town in Iowa, did have fireworks that year. I was a rather successful young man, three years out of high school and had a job with the state of Iowa. I shared an apartment in Boone with my best friend Gregg. It was a Friday night and Gregg and I decided to go to Pilot Mound to see some friends. We went to the pub there and had a few drinks; none of our friends showed up, however, so we thought they might be up on the mound. The "mound" is a small hill (rather large, for Iowa) that was left in its natural state. We used to get beer and go up there to drink it. At about 8:30, when the sun was setting (daylight savings time), we took my car and drove to the lower road and parked. Our intent was to climb the mound and surprise our friends, if they were there. Somehow everything gets fuzzy at this point, and I don't know what we actually did.

The next thing we know, we were driving away from the Mount, heading toward town. It was completely dark -- a starlit night with no clouds. Suddenly there was a flash of light -- you could see the entire countryside. It was as quick as the flash of a flashbulb. I slammed on the brakes and came to a complete stop. Gregg and I were both frightened and felt quite uneasy. We didn't say a word; we were speechless. After a brief pause of perhaps 30 seconds, I told Gregg we should get back to town.

We raced back to town and were surprised that all the houses were

dark. Not a car moved anywhere. Our biological clocks in our heads told us it could only be around 10 or so; something was wrong! Lights in that town stay on until at least midnight on Friday night, and the town is usually quite active. We headed uptown, which we found was also deserted. The pub had closed. We were perplexed, so we stopped to try to sort things out. There wasn't even anyone cleaning the bar (which usually closed at 1 or 2 a.m. in those days). Our best speculation was that they'd had a brawl big enough for the Sheriff to close the bar (which was extremely unlikely). We decided to go home (Boone was 15 miles away). We had no watches. We did, however, have a strong desire to talk to someone. No one was to be found.

We didn't talk much on the drive back home. The radio wasn't right, either; we couldn't get many stations, but the ones we did get seemed not to tell the time and also didn't make any sense. When we got to Boone, it was the same story. Although there was a population of 8,000, the streets were deserted and all the houses dark. We were confused and disoriented. I recall a thought running through my mind over and over: the Twilight Zone is science fiction, right?

When we got home the clock said something unbelievable like 3:30 a.m. At this point we were complete nervous wrecks and proceeded to find some "hard stuff" and get blitzed. We only talked about the events of the evening between ourselves for the next several days. After that, we never mentioned it again. How could we? It was 1976. People would immediately say something like "so that's what acid is like." But we had taken no drugs! This really happened, and I will never forget it. On examination the next day, my car had faint yet visible blue-green stains on the hood and roof that would not buff out.

MUFON-AZ Member



Desert Battle

Secret Air Base Broke Hazardous-Waste Act, Workers' Suit Alleges

U.S. Cites National Security In Fighting Claims Tied To Toxic Disposal Fires

Plaintiffs Fear Retaliation

By MARGARET A. JACOBS

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

LAS VEGAS—One day two years before he died, Helen Frost says, her husband, Robert, returned from his sheet-metal job at a top-secret Air Force base with flaming-red skin that soon began peeling off his face.

"He was a pretty tough guy, but he burst through the door yelling in fear," she recalls. "Every hour, I'd have to take a washcloth" and take off some more skin.

Mrs. Frost is one of two widows who, along with four former civilian workers, are suing the Defense Department in a so-called citizen's lawsuit (rather than a claim for tort damages). They contend that it violated federal hazardous-waste law by repeatedly burning ordinary chemicals and highly toxic classified materials in open pits at the base, which is located 125 miles northwest of Las Vegas and is commonly called Area 51.

The workers, who say their exposure to toxic fumes throughout the 1980s caused health problems ranging from skin lesions to cancer, are seeking classified information to facilitate medical treatment and help with medical bills but no other monetary damages. As employees of government subcontractors, which aren't named in the lawsuit, some of the plaintiffs say they have no medical insurance. They also want a court order requiring the government to follow the law and dispose of such waste safely. They themselves can't bring criminal charges.

So far, the government refuses to confirm or deny their allegations or to respond to their request for criminal prosecution. Instead, it asked U.S. District Judge Philip Pro, who is overseeing the case in Las Vegas, to dismiss the lawsuit, arguing that almost any disclosure about Area 51 could pose a "serious risk" to national security.



Robert Frost

Unusual Maneuver

That strategy is startling because the government apparently has never before invoked the so-called national-security privilege in a case in which the effect is to shield itself from criminal liability. The privilege is intended to prevent courtroom disclosures of state secrets involving intelligence gathering or military planning. But the burning alleged by the workers is a serious crime, punishable by up to 15 years in prison and a \$1 million fine. Indeed, the Justice Department has made the prosecution of civilians who illegally burn hazardous waste a priority.

Constitutional experts say the case could ultimately go to the Supreme Court because it tests the limits of executive-branch power. In a case involving Richard Nixon and Watergate, the high court said the president can't use executive privilege to shield evidence of a crime. But in response to the workers' suit, the government in effect argues that the national-security privilege—a form of executive privilege—gives the military more leeway than the president has to keep information secret, even if it involves a crime.

The case is also significant because it could determine whether the military will be held accountable for what many observers consider its dismal record of compliance with environmental laws. A government task force estimated in 1995 that cleaning up hazardous waste at federal facilities, mostly military-related, would cost \$234 billion to \$389 billion.

Information at Risk

"What I fear is the broadening of a principle that could block access to a whole range of information that should be available to the public," says Stephen Dycus, an expert on national security and the environment at the Vermont Law School.

At almost every turn since filing suit 18 months ago, the workers have been stymied by Justice Department lawyers. For several months last year, the lawyers even refused to acknowledge the existence or name of the base. Only after the workers introduced 300 pages of references to it in government documents, including the Congressional Record, did the lawyers relent somewhat.

The government lawyers also classified documents retroactively, preventing the workers from using them as evidence, the workers say. They refused to acknowledge that any of the men except Mr. Frost ever worked at the base. They even obtained a court order preventing the workers' lawyer from removing files from his own office.

In a special filing required from agency heads who want courts to recognize the national-security privilege, Secretary of the Air Force Sheila Widnall explained why the military is so cautious about disclosing anything about Area 51. "Collection of information regarding the air, water and soil" around a base, she said, "is a classic foreign intelligence practice because analysis of these samples can result in the identification of military operations and capabilities. . . . Disclosure of such information increases the risk to the lives of United States personnel and

decreases the probability of successful mission accomplishment."

The Air Force declines to comment on specific allegations or on the lawsuit, but a senior attorney for the service defends its record. "We take our responsibility concerning protection of the environment seriously, and we also take seriously our obligations to protect national security," he says. "We believe protecting the environment and national security are not incompatible." In addition, a spokeswoman says that in 1993 the government's Council on Environment Quality rated the Air Force's environmental-management program the best in the government.

Although the plaintiffs concede Area 51 harbors military secrets that must be protected, Jonathan Turley, a George Washington University law professor who represents the plaintiffs and more than two dozen other Area 51 employees who so far haven't joined in the suit, says the government's position is too extreme.

"The government claims that revealing any information about Area 51 would jeopardize American lives," he says. "The only American lives lost so far are those of their own workers."

Base Not So Secret

The plaintiffs disparage the government's response, partly because Area 51 isn't much of a secret. Until access to a nearby ridge was restricted last year, Area 51's runways, radar towers and many of its 200 buildings could be seen by anyone who looked. Just off the Las Vegas strip, in fact, is a bar called Area 51.

The base has had a local reputation as a big employer since the 1950s. Well before dawn most weekdays, hundreds of civilian workers can be seen parking in a far corner of McCarran International Airport. From there, they fly free of charge in unmarked planes to the base, which sits on a dry lake bed called Groom Lake near where atomic bombs were once tested. The Area 51 name is derived from its designation on Nevada test-site maps.

Area 51's 1,000 civilian and 2,000 military employees sign oaths to keep all information about the base confidential, and the former workers who sued take it seriously. Fearing government retaliation for whistle-blowing, they have obtained unusual permission from Judge Pro to be known publicly as John Does.

Speaking nervously in interviews in Las Vegas hotel rooms, where their lawyer had taken precautions to prevent government monitoring, the men recently described the illegal burning and what they view as the military's indifference to their health. They spoke on the condition that they not be identified in any way.

They say the illegal burning grew out of the extreme secrecy at the base, where U-2 spy planes, F-117 stealth bombers and other secret aircraft have been developed and tested. In military parlance, it is a "black" base: Access is granted only to people with top-secret security clearance.

Nothing left the facility except the workers, they say. All else, including office furniture, jeeps and leftover lobster and prime rib, was either burned or buried.

Frequent Fires

During the 1980s, the men say, classified materials were burned at least once a week in 100-foot-long, 25-foot-wide pits. With security guards standing at the edge, Air Force personnel threw in hazardous chemicals such as methylethylketone, a common cleaning solvent, and other things, such as computers, that produce dioxin when burned. The toxic brew, including drums of hazardous waste trucked in from defense facilities in other states, was ignited with jet fuel and typically burned for eight to 12 hours, the men say.

Helen Frost says her husband, after being exposed to the thick, black fumes, endured constant headaches and itchy eyes. But, like many of the men, he continued to work because his pay—about \$50,000 a year—was high and the work was consistent, she says.

In the mid-1980s, however, dozens of Area 51 workers began developing breathing difficulties, chest pains, neurological problems and chronic skin inflammation—all classic signs of exposure to toxins. The burning especially affected those who worked outdoors in maintenance and construction, about 150 to 300 yards downwind from the pits.

The skin condition, which they called "fish scales," broke out on their hands, legs, backs and faces. They say they used emery boards and sandpaper to remove the embarrassing scabs. "I never saw anything like it. We would get it dried up in one spot, and then it would pop up somewhere else," says Stella Kasza, another plaintiff. Last April, her husband, Walter, a sheet-metal worker, died of liver and kidney cancer, which his wife blames on a decade of exposure to the burning.

The workers contend that when they asked for protective gear, Air Force officers rebuffed them. "They told us we could buy our own masks and then pointed to the gate and told us we could leave if we didn't like it," recalls one of the John Does, who, like the others, believes that the officers resented the civilians' higher wages. Though the workers used gloves they purchased themselves, they say base-security policy prevented them from bringing in any other protective gear.

Reluctant Patients

Many refused to seek medical help or gave doctors incomplete explanations for their symptoms. They say they feared 10-year prison terms for talking about the base, as, they say, Air Force security police repeatedly warned them.

But after Mr. Frost died of cirrhosis of the liver in 1989, many felt they had no choice but to seek legal advice. A study of Mr. Frost's fatty tissue by Peter Kahn, a Rutgers University biochemist and expert on chemical and hazardous substances, found unusually high levels of dioxins and other carcinogens in Mr. Frost's cells that he attributed to industrial exposure. Dioxins typically target the liver and cause severe skin reactions, Mr. Kahn says. Though not the cause of Mr. Frost's liver ailment, Mr. Kahn adds, exposure to the

chemicals could have accelerated its progress, resulting in premature death. But the government had denied Mr. Frost's request for worker's compensation.

Prof. Turley and his clients say they can prove the government violated the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, the federal law regulating hazardous waste. And they say they can do this without revealing anything that would undermine national security.

The law makes it a crime for anyone who handles hazardous waste, including owners of oil-change shops such as Jiffy Lubes, to do so without getting a permit or transportation manifest. It also requires Environmental Protection Agency inspections. Early in the litigation, the government conceded that it had never applied for a permit or manifest for Area 51.

But the government has consistently refused to acknowledge that hazardous wastes of any sort were kept at the base or that common industrial chemicals such as trichloroethylene were used there. The solvent, found in most machines with moving parts, is on the list of toxins that must be reported and are regulated under the law.

"Acknowledging that a large military base has trichloroethylene is like saying that a cleaning crew has ammonia. It would hardly be cause for celebration in the Russian intelligence services," Prof. Turley says.

Evidence in a Manual

The government's position outraged some Area 51 workers, who sent an unclassified government security-training manual to Prof. Turley. It confirms the existence of a "vehicle paint and body shop" and "base battery storage" operations that typically produce hazardous waste. When Prof. Turley asked Judge Pro to accept the manual as evidence, however, the plaintiffs say the government classified it retroactively. Government lawyers then tried to retrieve the document from Prof. Turley and from news reporters even though it was available on the Internet.

The government also asked the judge to seal the transcript of a telephone conference call he held with attorneys for both sides about the manual. At the government's request, the judge placed Prof. Turley's office under seal until he decides what to do.

"The government has been simply stonewalling," says Steven Aftergood of the Federation of American Scientists, a Washington group concerned with, among other things, what it considers excessive government secrecy.

The workers' attorneys have repeatedly asked Judge Pro, who once found that the government wasn't liable for injuries to 216 workers exposed to radiation at the Nevada test site between 1951 and 1981, to limit the material the government can restrict under the national-security privilege to truly sensitive information. In other privilege cases, the lawyers say, judges have segregated sensitive material and given the public access to the rest. A few courts have enlisted special judges with high-level security clearance or held secret

trials rather than dismiss cases against the government. Vermont's Prof. Dycus says.

The 'Mosaic' Theory

The Defense Department, however, claims to have properly asserted the national-security privilege. Though conceding that its position will result in some routine information about the base being withheld, government lawyers argue that they can't acknowledge seemingly innocuous facts without creating a "mosaic" that an enemy could use to figure out what the military considers a secret.

While Judge Pro hasn't ruled on the government's motion to dismiss the case, he has decided in its favor on most important issues, including the "mosaic" theory. Last month, he found that the government had properly refused to provide virtually all of the material sought by the plaintiffs and that the government had properly classified the manual. He also rejected without explanation the workers' argument that the government can't use the privilege to conceal evidence of a crime. Prof. Turley's office remains under seal and off limits to faculty members and students. He says his clients intend to appeal many of the judge's rulings.

On one important point, however, the workers prevailed. Last spring, the government disclosed that the EPA had begun inspecting Area 51, making it the first "black" base opened to public inspection. But, citing the privilege, the government refused to make the inspection report public, as required by law. After the plaintiffs objected, Judge Pro ruled the government could withhold the report only if it got an exemption from the president.

Shortly afterward, President Clinton, who the same week publicly apologized to the victims of radiation experiments and who is opening up long-classified files about public exposure to atom-bomb tests in the 1950s, granted the exemption. The memo said keeping the reports secret was in the nation's "paramount interest."



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