

## The Case of the Boomerang UFO Crash at Corinth

by John C. Thompson,  
Field Investigator, LaGrange, Georgia

You be the judge: Did something of Roswellian proportions happen in the late 1970s in Heard County, Georgia? Or was it a simple misidentification by a truthful witness, that when combined with other bizarre events, makes the impossible seem possible?

My investigation, like many other UFO cases, started routinely enough. Talking to a dispatcher at the LaGrange Police Department, I inquired about the police being called in on a Christmas tree-like UFO sighting in the housing projects. The dispatcher, finding no evidence that such a call had been made as the witness had claimed, said off-hand, before we hung up, that she had a relative who for years had talked of a strange UFO encounter. Getting the relative's phone number, I immediately set about trying to reach her.

Three weeks later, and after many unanswered phone calls — she was in Florida on vacation — the sightee in question called me. What unfolded during our initial conversation conjured memories of the infamous Roswell, New Mexico saucer crash.

Carolyn Shelnett, the sole witness, was at her home near Corinth, Georgia, when the alleged crash of the UFO took place. Stepping outside to get her mail, she looked up in time to see a boomerang metallic finished UFO flying across the northern sky. Bigger and faster than a commercial jet airliner the boomerang UFO traveled southwest for several seconds as Ms. Shelnett



*Rendition of retrieval operation of crashed UFO at Corinth by Jimmy Smith*



## Calendar of Events

July 5,6,7 .....	MUFON 1996 UFO Symposium Greensboro, NC \$55 before June 29, \$60 after Hotel Reservations: 1-800-242-6556
July 14, 1:00 PM .....	Field investigator training class
Aug. 10 .....	Great Smoky Mountains UFO, Crop Circle and Alien Contact EXPO. Gatlinburg, TN
Oct. 18-20 .....	North Alabama UFO Conference



watched in awe. Suddenly, there was a brilliant flash. Immediately, and without slowing down, the craft did a full right-angle turn and dropped to the horizon within "three seconds." As the UFO had been half-way up on the horizon, and moving close to a 1000 mph, the radical maneuver seemed to indicate the craft was not man-made.

Rushing inside, Ms. Shelnutt hastily got her three children, who were preparing to go to bed, and put them into her car. Convinced that a new type of plane, or even UFO, had crashed, she drove northwest to where she thought the craft had disappeared. Driving on Highway 100 towards Corinth, she saw smoke coming out of the woods just before dark. Turning north on Old Corinth Road, her car accidentally went off the road into a ditch. One of the children flagged down a passing motorist, and they waited patiently for Mr. Shelnutt, who ran a nearby service station in Hogansville, to return and pick them up. Freeing Ms. Shelnutt's car, they all returned home and then transferred to Mr. Shelnutt's vehicle to try to find the crash site. Going further West on Highway 100, they turned on Charles B. Johnston Road this time. Driving 1.9 miles North, and just past the New River crossing, they stopped. Looking directly West, and over a small line of hills about a thousand feet away, they observed several helicopters at low altitude shining spotlights on the ground. Among the now dark trees and scrub, Ms. Shelnutt says the lights cut through a haze of smoke, like a smoldering fire would produce. Her oldest son, Rodney, then "8 or 9 years old," says he actually saw a fire in the woods. The distant fire reminded him of "a house or plane on fire." His sister, Rhonda, one year older, only remembers "hearing the helicopters"; Rusty, the youngest child, 5-7 years old at the time, recalls nothing except "getting stuck" somewhere. (No interview was conducted with Ms. Shelnutt's now former husband as he didn't "want to get involved.") So, what happened near Charles B. Johnston Road nearly two decades ago?

A search for other witnesses completely failed. Three longtime residents on the Charles B. Johnston Road remember hearing or seeing nothing that related to crashed planes, UFOs, or fires during the last twenty years. They all were accustomed to seeing military helicopters fly over; as they still often do. Checking with a hunter, who once leased the desolate area

around the site in question, in the late '80s, he said that he had never seen any crash debris or evidence of an impact from the sky. A commercial pilot who regularly flies over Heard County at elevations of less than a thousand feet, says nothing looks unusual to suggest a former crash site near Corinth. A superficial search by this investigator and two long-time ufologists on a power-line right-of-way that skirts the alleged crash area produced nothing interesting. (Permission from the absentee landowner of the exact site where smoke and fire were seen, to make a thorough search, thus far, has not been gained.) No other witnesses or physical evidence to Ms. Shelnutt's crash can be found. Things get exciting, though, once we move beyond the reputed site of the UFO crash.

Two miles directly south of the alleged site, a six-sided, low-hovering, UFO was seen in the Summer of 1992. With two families, in nearby mobile homes watching, the UFO with clusters of three white lights at each corner eventually moved slowly north towards New River.

Four miles southwest of the Corinth crash site at the Potato Creek crossing on the Heard-Troup county line, two brothers saw a bright orange, cigar-shaped UFO while coon hunting. Dodging a low-flying plane, and dancing erratically across the dark Summer sky, the 1975 UFO terrified the brothers. Five years later at the same spot, another witness watched a giant 600 foot long cigar-shaped UFO suck water through a 3 foot diameter tube from Potato Creek. Emitting "a blue light" reminiscent of what "a tungsten-inert gas torch makes," the dark UFO traversed sideways as it pulled the darker tube up inside its blue-lit side-opening. On reaching the observer, who was parked in his car on the side of Hwy. 27, the silent UFO flew-over at tree-top level, and then "instantly accelerated" out of sight! The sightee, a tool and die foreman, speculated that the craft might have been "taking on cooling water" for, what he surmised, its nuclear-fueled engines.

Moving 2 miles north, and the same south, a different witness saw a similar craft 3 times over a period of several days in April of 1995. Like the tool and die foreman, he saw the cigar-shaped UFO closely, and also while driving on Hwy 27. Moving slowly, on each occasion, the ship was surrounded by red, green, and white lights. While no opening or hanging tube was seen, the craft's bottom did have a

large central indentation that looked "as if it could open up." In all 3 sightings, according to the then 25 year-old machine operator, the craft either crossed New River, or in the case of the single Troup County sighting, traveled towards it.

So what does all this mean? And how does it relate to the alleged UFO crash of Ms. Shelnutt's? To try to answer these questions, we must consider the military activity that has occurred in this same area.

On 28 May 1977, a civilian Bell 206B helicopter equipped with sprayers, and possible searchlight, crashed on the west side of Hwy. 27, near the New River crossing. According to the same witness who saw the cigar-shaped UFO with the tube, and his nephew who was with him, the chopper was doing something highly suspicious.

Both agree, at least locally, that the crash was kept secret. Checking the county forestry unit, only a mile away, a man who has worked there since 1968 said he had never heard of the helicopter crash. Sheriff Crook, then a game warden in 1977, said he too was unaware of the crash. Another who owns property near the helicopter crash location, also expressed surprise on learning of the crash. But more than this, is the testimony of the two witnesses — even if it does diverge.

The tool and die foreman says that on racing to the helicopter crash, he spotted, before getting there, an unbeknownst "cleared-off landing area and bivouac." Astonishingly, he claims he saw military jeeps, trucks, helicopters, tents, and soldiers there. Additionally, he says they were working with civilians in "white decontamination suits, complete with beehive type headgear." White helicopters, such as the Bell 206B that they were to eventually find, he says, were also seen in the clearing.

On reaching the helicopter crash, he hurriedly took several black and white 35mm photographs of the chopper laying on its side in a gully. The chopper was heavily damaged, and the pilot gone (bloody bandages were found nearby). Suddenly, a soldier and civilians in the "beehive type" suits appeared. Yelling, the soldier screamed for someone to "Grab that camera!" Running, he and his nephew hid in bushes, and dodged around until they lost their pursuers. The nephew has a different version:

He says that he saw no cleared-off area, and equally importantly, no military. He does acknowledge that

they were chased by unknown persons, and the pursuers did want the photos his uncle had taken. He also says he had heard that the helicopter "was spraying for fire ants"; but, like his uncle, is certain that the craft was doing something it wasn't supposed to be doing.

There was a third witness to this incident—the tool and die foreman's young son — but he was not available for an interview. The father, though, concedes that his son doesn't remember the military being involved, for reasons he still doesn't fathom. What is clear is that nobody in Heard County, besides the above three witnesses, has ever talked publicly about the helicopter crash. Indeed, the exact date for the crash was only ascertained after contacting the National Transportation Safety Board in Washington, D.C. (The corporate owner, and pilot, of the helicopter is not listed in their crash report. This is still being investigated.)

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### ... the soldier screamed for someone to "Grab that camera!"

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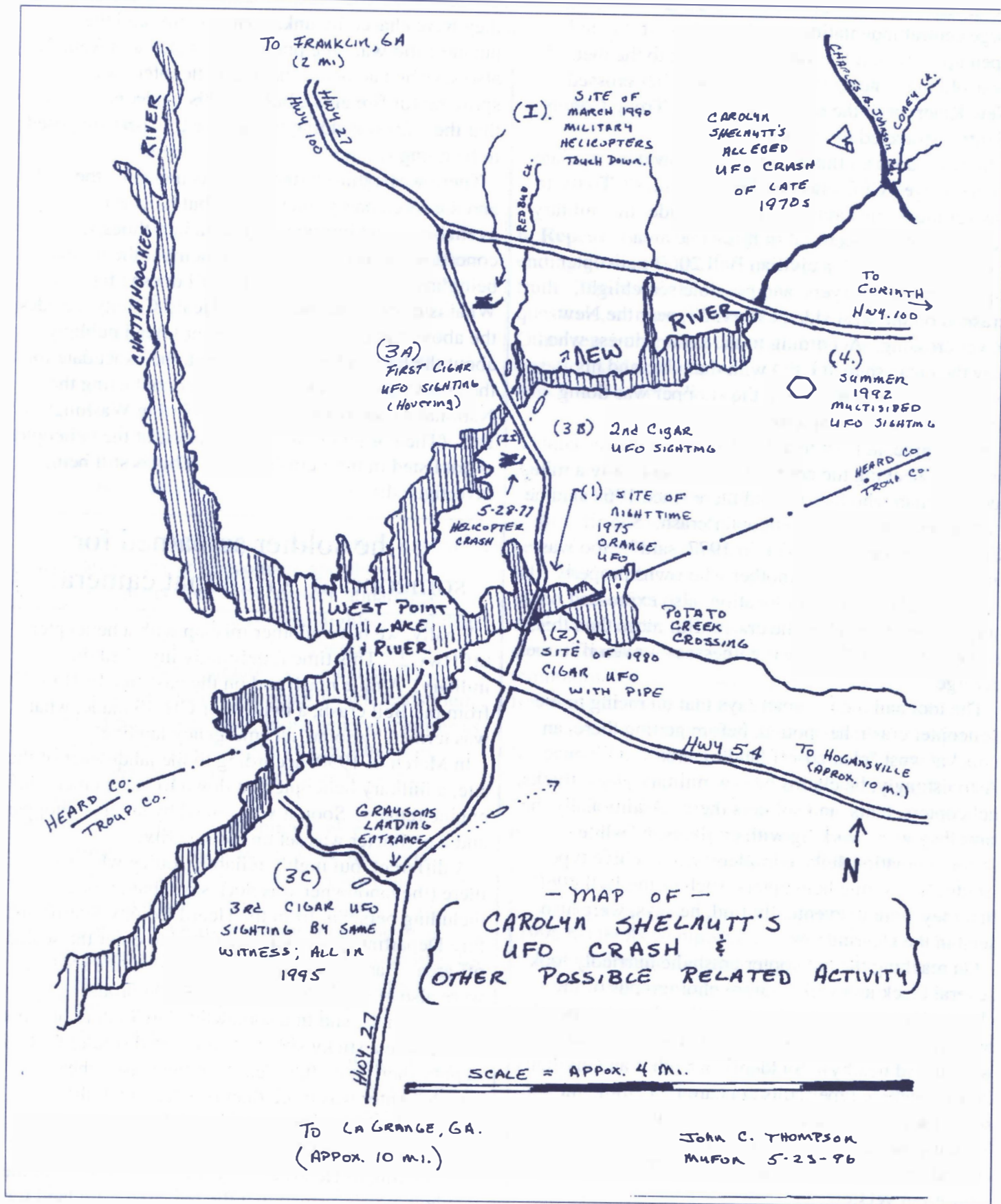
Finally, we have another mishap with a helicopter off Hwy 27. This time it definitely involved the military. A mile north and on the east side of Hwy 27 from the Bell crash, a twin-rotor CH-46 made, what was termed by some, an emergency landing.

In March of 1990, according to the landowner of the site, a military helicopter sat down to make emergency engine repairs. Soon it was joined by another chopper, and a perimeter was set up for security.

A different, but highly reliable, source who was there (the landowner was not), says that no one — including personal from the Heard County Sheriff and Fire Departments — was permitted to enter the sealed off area. Barricades, according to this same source, were also erected around the area. On prodding by local officials, and in a somewhat conciliatory attempt to alleviate a sticky situation, an armed soldier told deputy sheriffs on the scene that the reason they couldn't enter was more than just "engine failure." Elaborating, the same soldier said they "were on a secret mission, and had a high-ranking officer aboard."

On talking to Heard County Sheriff Crook about the incident, he confirmed that the helicopter did land for repairs, but on whether he was denied access to the





Heard and Troup County UFO Corridor. Map drawn by John Thompson and Jimmy Smith.





Was this crashed Bell helicopter part of the nighttime retrieval operation?

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site, he said only, "I can go anywhere I want to in this county." He further related that the helicopters were only on the ground for a few hours, and like the other source there, acknowledged that they left around 10-11 PM. (The helicopters were later seen flying north over nearby Franklin; then west towards Alabama.)

Another source who lives off Hwy 27 says he first noticed the helicopters around 10 AM. He also says that they had no engine problems as the 'copters were "low enough" for him to have heard any mechanical difficulties. Moreover, he claims the choppers were definitely searching, and on the ground for more than just a few hours as the others estimated. If so, were the soldiers looking for debris of an unknown object that others had missed many years ago in a nighttime retrieval operation?

Ms. Shelnutt on seeing the boomerang UFO go down, said she initially thought it had crashed about "7-8 miles away." On finally reaching where the helicopters and smoke were, she was surprised that it was only about half the distance away. Was the crash really off Charles B. Johnston Road, or further west as Ms. Shelnutt originally thought?

The civilian Bell helicopter, was it part of the retrieval operation? Or was it being used only for decontamination purposes to prevent alien contamination? It may be there is no connection at all.

Ms. Shelnutt and her older son both believe that the crash occurred after November 27, 1977, when Ms. Shelnutt's father died from cancer. Still, there is no certainty of when the alleged UFO crash happened. Ms. Shelnutt concedes it could have been earlier because of the 1977 Ford Escort she was then driving. (She is certain she bought the Escort before May 28, 1977; and she and Rodney both say they were in the Escort when searching for the downed UFO.)

Did a UFO only, perhaps, touch down, and start a fire? Have the military been monitoring this area for a long time because it has a high incidence of alien activity? Are alien craft landing along the Heard-Troup corridor because there is something there they want? Is it a mineral anomaly that is attracting them? (There is some extremely light zinc mineralization along the New River in Heard County. Further south, in central Troup County, there are a few old beryl mines — beryl is the principal ore for beryllium.) Then there is the odd curiosity related by Allen J. Giles, a State of Georgia geologist.

Mr. Giles says that not long ago, some unusual specimens of quartz were given to the Georgia Geological Survey. The quartz rocks came from "central or western Troup County" he believes, and they display a remarkable piezoelectric quality that he or other State geologists have never seen before. Rubbing two flat surfaces of the quartz samples together, they were able to create a soft glow where the rocks interacted. He says that while there is some old German literature on this subject from the 1930s to support that this phenomenon has been documented before, it is certainly not common. According to the literature found, the glow created by rubbing this special quartz together is called, "triboluminescence." Could this property of triboluminescence be the reason why so many alien craft are visiting the Heard-Troup corridor? Are they coming to the Piedmont region of western Georgia and eastern Alabama — I have since done my own experimentation with quartz from both areas and duplicated the glowing effect — to acquire quartz that is easily energized? More likely, and with quartz being most common, triboluminescence may account for some local sightings, but not the close encounters I have described. Simpler yet, and as one abductee/contactee has told me, are extraterrestrials solely visiting this portion of the Piedmont for the many large granite outcrops, and remoteness, it offers?

Most elementary, and relating more to Ms. Shelnutt's claim, did a plane crash near Corinth? If so, why was there not anything in the newspapers, or on the radio or television about it? Could the alleged Corinth crash have involved a prototype of a, then secret, stealth bomber? The shape of Ms. Shelnutt's sketch of the object certainly suggests a stealth bomber. It should be noted, though, that Ms. Shelnutt and her children heard no explosion, or felt any heavy earth vibration, which would be characteristic of a close by plane crash. Nor do they claim to have seen any actual object on the ground — just smoke, and with Rodney, a fire. Did any object *actually* crash or land near Corinth?

Unfortunately my investigation of the crashed boomerang UFO, and possible related activity, leaves more questions unanswered, than answered. It really comes down to where we began: Did something of Roswellian proportions happen in the late 1970s in Heard County, Georgia? Or is it a simple misidentification by a truthful witness, that....

## Why have they come?

*Michael Norris is a professional writer and investigator of the UFO phenomenon. Michael welcomes any comments or viewpoints about this phenomenon. He currently resides in Norcross, Georgia.*

by Michael Norris

My pager rang as I sat at my keyboard hammering away at the keys. Looking down I saw that it was Leigh Culver, my good friend and a leader in UFO abduction research. Grabbing the phone, I dialed his number and Leigh quickly answered. "We have to meet immediately," Leigh said in a voice of urgency. This sent a chill up my spine — Leigh is not one to sound urgent. "What's going on," I responded. "Not over the phone," he said.

Meeting at a nearby restaurant, Leigh explained how Mark, an abductee that we have been working with, was pinned down by three military men in his bedroom and was threatened because of probes into his abduction experiences! Specifically, Mark's son was threatened if he did not cease with his hypnosis sessions. This horrified Mark, who loves his son very dearly.

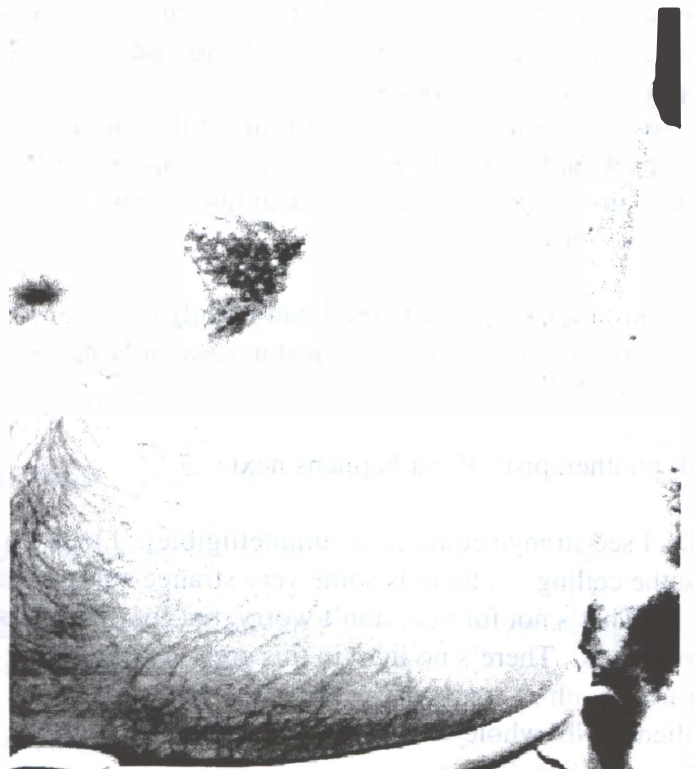
"What?!" I said. "They came to his house?" After we both agreed that there was something wrong with this story, Leigh left the restaurant and soon convinced Mark to undergo a hypnosis session. After great difficulty under hypnosis, the truth came out. There never were three military men in Mark's bedroom. The entities that have visited him so many times before were promoting a lie in his mind. Ironically, this was a great relief for Mark, who was terrified before the hypnosis session.

Personally, I am not so relieved. Mark's encounter shows a great deception created to silence an abductee from revealing part of the mystery we call the UFO abduction phenomenon. After interviewing and working with abductees all over the country for the past six years, I can say that no other phenomenon alarms me more. The thought that a seemingly higher intelligence is interacting with our world, with its citizens, whenever it chooses to and goes to great

measures to conceal itself, sometimes even promoting deception, is extremely disturbing. There is a secret agenda — one that we are participants in, but are not informed as to what it is. Why are they here, whoever "they" may be, and what do they want? These are the questions we keep asking ourselves. Is there an answer? Maybe we will never know, but I believe we can learn pieces of this puzzle with every abduction account we investigate.

Consider the story of a local abductee I will call David. I have conducted interviews with David for the past two years, and can attest that he is a highly intelligent and rational individual. Leigh Culver has known him longer, and has been working with him hypnotically to learn more about his abduction experiences. What follows is just one of David's bizarre encounters.

September 12, 1994, David lay down in his bed around 9 p.m. to go to sleep. He awoke in the middle of the night, peered at the clock — 2 a.m. — he went back to sleep. The next morning, David felt a deep pain in his abdomen. "What did you do," he jokingly asked his wife, "hit me last night when I was asleep?" David looked down at his abdomen where he felt the pain and noticed a faint bruise beginning to appear.





Several days went by and the bruise turned dark with a reddish purple color. Astonishingly, the bruise was a perfect 5.2 cm equilateral triangle! The pain associated with the bruise was still "very deep." David had already been working with Leigh about his past abduction experiences, and since he remembered having a strange dream that night along with the unusual bruise, he decided to undergo another hypnosis session.

Before hypnosis, Leigh had a doctor friend examine the bruise. "Although odd-shaped bruises are not uncommon," the doctor commented, "in my many years as an emergency physician, I have never seen a triangular-shaped bruise." What amazed the doctor even more was that David had no conscious recollection of how he obtained the bruise.

Two hypnosis sessions conducted by Leigh Culver followed, focusing on the evening David received his bruise. As in so many other cases, David and his wife were not alone that night.

David woke up around 2:00 a.m. to discover himself surrounded by small beings trying to roll him over. They were what we have termed the "grays," having large bald heads, big black eyes, long arms and four-fingered hands. However, the "grays" were not the only entities in the room with David. Also present were some "robed entities," that stood four to five feet high and had a stout appearance. David said they appeared like "little monks."

Soon afterward, David found himself floating past his backyard trees into a large triangular-shaped craft. Once inside the craft, he was taken into a room where he described what he saw:

David: I'm on my back, but I can't really feel anything supporting me. It's just a sense of lying — not upright.

Hypnotherapist: What happens next?

D: I see strange equipment [unintelligible]. I look up at the ceiling . . . there is some very strange equipment . . . "That's not for you, don't worry, not for you." It's very dark. There's no light in this area. I keep seeing parts . . . uh . . . parts of . . . they look like parts of aliens! Not whole . . . they're . . . uh . . . [excited] parts of aliens!

H: Parts?

D: Yea, like parts of an arm, maybe part of a back. There are parts in this room . . . [excited] of aliens! There's not only whole . . . [exhale] . . . there's not only aliens around, but there's also dissected aliens around! Very strange.

H: What else do you see?

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**I personally believe we  
are part of an ongoing  
project with a higher  
intelligence.**

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D: This is frightening! [apprehensive] I see more body parts! Over on the right it looks like part of a leg and a foot. I can't see it . . . the whole thing.

H: Do you see the beings manipulating any of these body parts at all — or are they just laying there?

D: No, the parts are on display. [pause] These are old — old parts. Some of these parts are not human.

H: Does that mean that some of the parts might be human?

D: Some are. I see part of a leg. It looks like a black man's foot! It's black . . . dark skin . . . human. It's kind of hard to see. [long pause] It looks like an alien hand that's been dissected. The flesh is laid open. It's very strenuous. It's not like our . . . our tissue . . . our muscle runs . . . well . . . uh . . . a lateral fashion. Their muscle and tissue run longitudinal. Very strange. It's almost constricted. I don't understand it, but it's different.

H: Are you able to notice any differences between the "alien parts" and the beings in the room?

D: Some are very stout in appearance. I mean massive. Some that are . . . uh . . . that have very



convoluted flesh. Several different species here. Not just one, two, or three, but several here. Almost looks like some sort of anatomy lab. I'm being told to lie very still.

H: What is the overall feeling that you are experiencing right now?

D: There seems to be an urgency right now for what they're doing.

H: Do you understand the urgency?

D: [pause] There is something very wrong with me.

H: Do they convey what is wrong — wrong with you?

D: Yes. They're worried . . . very worried. Like they're showing me images of myself . . . dead . . . with blood coming out of my mouth. Some sort of urgency!

H: Do they describe what the problem is?

D: No. It's a feeling — that it's okay now.

H: Now when they show you these images, what do you think of that? What are you thinking?

D: I'm thinking, why are they showing me images of me dead? Why would they do that? Is it a warning? At this time, I feel like something is being pulled . . . uh . . . open. Like my abdominal area is being stretched. It's very hot like being under a very intense lamp. They don't want me to see anything. I feel dull pain. Getting me under . . . [unintelligible] [long pause].

H: Are you able to move?

D: Not at this time. I'm paralyzed. I'm motionless. It's like I'm stuck to a large magnet . . . and . . . you couldn't move a finger if you tried.

H: Can you describe what is happening?

D: There's a hand on my forehead, covering my eyes . . . holding me. [pause] I feel almost as if something is

stretched over it, there's no pain now, no pain whatsoever. It's just a weird feeling. Kind of like the skin is being stretched. [pause] There's no pain . . . whatsoever . . . like it's, like pain is being totally blocked. [pause] it's hot again, it's almost like looking at the sun through closed eyes, very bright light . . . very, very bright. [long pause]

H: Please continue.

D: Well, what I'm seeing right now is that they're going to move me out of this area. They're going to move me into a holding room. They are going to take me back.

H: Okay, before you move on to what happens next, can you describe more on what these beings look like?

D: [long pause]

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## They look like some of the Easter Island figures.

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H: Do they remind you of anything?

D: No. They definitely have a different look though. [pause] They don't want me talking about this!

H: That's okay. Do you feel that you have a right to talk about this?

D: I can tell you what they look like. They look like some of the Easter Island figures. Very, very long features. Very stout.

H: What is their skin color?

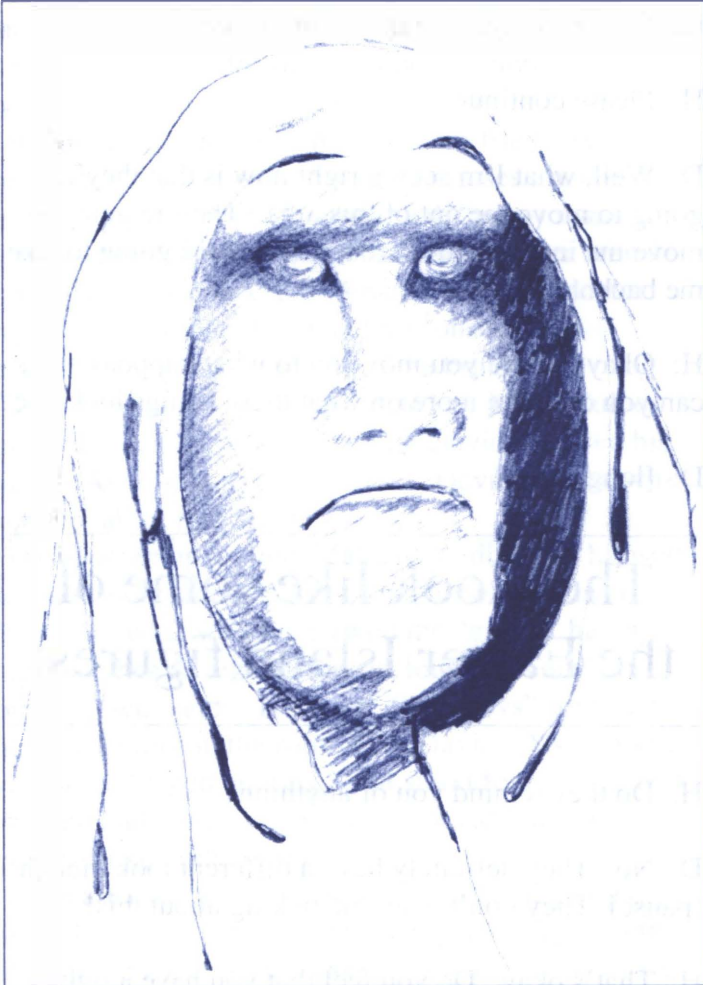
D: Grayish brown on these.

H: These grayish-brown Easter Island type beings, how tall would you say they are?

D: About five feet.

H: What type of build do they have? Is it like a human build?

D: No. No. They look just like the Easter Island figures. That is what they look like. Very strange.



*Easter Island alien figure  
sketched by Lynn Culver*

H: Besides these beings, who else or what else do you see?

D: I see the center of the room. It's unusual, it's like it's built around this circular shaft and the room itself is . . . uh . . . semicircular. The portion that I'm looking at . . . [long pause] . . . it is like they want me out of there now!

H: Why do they want you out of there?

D: Finished.

H: Before you move to the next memory, what do some of the other being's look like?

D: I just keep focusing on some of their hands. Some of the tissue. Some of the things I keep staring at. I can't see very far away. (Note — David normally wears glasses.) There's some shadowy figures back there. I can't tell whether these are models or subjects . . . they're very still. You look closely at the specimens . . . they don't seem to mind that.

H: Do they communicate any information regarding these specimens?

D: They seem somewhat relaxed at the fact that I'm curious about seeing the tissue of these other beings. This is strange stuff! Different. One piece looks like a . . . uh . . . a large cabbage leaf, except it's frayed off the edges. It looks like muscle tissue toward the edges. Just . . . it's very unusual.

H: What color is it?

D: It's white on the edges. The color is a rich purple with a green in it. Green down the center. It has a sort of reddish purple and [unintelligible] on the edges. Pretty unusual. No idea what this is from.

H: How is this displayed?

D: It's actually stretched out on . . . uh . . . a what looks like a piece of metal. It's being held on a piece of metal.

H: Are these like little tables, or trays, or . . .

D: It's all funny to me. It looks like a display. It's like it electrostatically clings . . . like the specimens . . . I don't know.

H: What is the lighting like in this room?

D: It's very dense. There's some light off to my left, but it's . . . [exhale] . . . a lot of the panels in the ceiling, the floor, and the walls glow.

H: Does the room have a predominant color?



D: Metallic . . . metallic gray. It's just dark. It's like if you looked in a very dark room. That's the predominant color. It's dark.

H: Besides the Easter Island type beings do you see any other type of beings?

D: There's some like the grays and there's the one that seems to be in charge.

H: Can you describe the leader further?

D: All I can see are his face and his hand. It's really rough. It's somewhat like that. It's just cracky. It's really rough. He's saying, "You're going to be okay now." [long pause]

H: Please continue.

D: You try to get an idea of what is going on around you, you try to remember, and they're trying to block it. They don't want you remembering. It interferes with their work.

H: Do you know what their work is?

D: Their answer is that "we can't explain it to you. We're not allowed. [pause] We have our orders. We can't help you." That's, that's all they'll say. They're not here to help us with that . . . to answer our questions.

David's experience raises a host of questions. What was the motive behind his encounter? Was something wrong with David? Was this just a maintenance check to "fix" something with his body. And what were all the "parts" on display that David described. Are we just part of some advanced science project? On the surface, these individual stories sound ludicrous, but take them all together, and an ultimate agenda is perhaps revealed.

I find it interesting that David described some of the beings as "Easter Island types." Were the colossal statues weighing in excess of 90 tons on tiny Easter Island a symbol of a race that visited us in ancient past. Or is it just a coincidence that David described

these beings as looking like those ancient marvels. One can only speculate.

I personally believe we are part of an ongoing project with a higher intelligence. I honestly wish I could believe differently, but the thousands of cases on record with the various physical marks and scars associated with them prevent me from doing so.

As researchers, we have been good about dividing up the different entity types, different craft, clothes, symbols and instruments seen with these encounters. We have defined what they look like and how they act. But I believe the most important question of all still alludes us . . . why? Why have we been chosen for this? Why have they come? Will our future be shaped by these experiences? I don't feel that these questions will be easily answered. Only more persistence and investigation will reveal the truth.

This is where you come in. Yes, I'm now speaking to you. What can you do? I urge you to become involved if you haven't already. Humanity has proven to have powerful strength when working in unison. Imagine a world where the scientific community has joined together to unlock these secrets. I think we can do it, how about you?

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*Georgia Sky Watch* newsletter are greatly appreciated.



## Science or Belief: Where is Ufology? Part One

*Daniel Sharpe earned his Master's degree in Information and Computer Science from the Georgia Institute of Technology. In his spare time, he is an armchair philosopher and a closet Fortean.*

by Daniel T. Sharpe

"Scientists have an unquestioned faith in questioning everything. But this faith in reason and experiment is as important for science as faith in God is for religion. Both founded on faith, science and religion ask many of the same questions."

— Seth Lloyd

### INTRODUCTION

Many ufologists feel their field gets a bum rap from the scientific community. Some scientists think all of ufology is nothing but a collection of hoaxes, hysteria, and misinterpreted natural phenomena, and they may refer to it by derogatory terms such as "mania" or "delusion", or by dismissive terms such as "myth". Extreme examples are the skeptics organizations such as CSICOP (The Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal), which is fanatically devoted to debunking all claims that certain unexplained phenomena have supernatural or paranormal causes. In any issue of their journal, *The*

*Skeptical Inquirer*, one finds open hostility towards notions held dear by many members of MUFON.

The impression this conveys is one of dogmatic devotion to an inflexible and intolerant world view, that scientists are a bunch of know-it-alls who are too pig-headed to listen to the truths that regular folk have to offer. Some people also think that science is "just another religion", and that when a scientist describes something as "unscientific" this should be translated as more like "heretical". However, this is not really an accurate picture of science in general. In this article I will give an overview of how science works, why it works the way it does, and what clues to look for to help tell the difference between science and non-science.

"Nothing is more important than striving after the truth. Nothing can be allowed to stand in the way of apprehending the truth. This is the credo of the scientist."

— Richard H. Bube

### SCIENCE

Science is one approach to trying to find an answer to the question, "What are the rules governing the behavior of the universe and everything in it?" This is a huge question, and in order to try to address it we have to set some ground rules. Scientists typically assume, first, that the rules governing the universe are fixed and that they operate independently of any observer. These are reasonable assumptions, given that every time we observe the world it seems to be following the same rules it did the previous time.

Another assumption most scientists make is that the best way to understand the universe is by dissecting it into parts of manageable size, and finding out how all these little parts work. Then we can add up the models of the small pieces to get the big picture. In other words, the whole is the sum of its parts. (There is a branch of science, called complex systems, which takes a more holistic view, asserting that the whole can be greater than the sum of its parts. This is a new field, still in its infancy, and has not yet made much impact on science as a whole.)

So, if the proverbial tree falls in the woods then of course it makes a sound because the laws of physics don't change when no one is around to check up on them. And we can create a theory to explain the behavior of the tree as it falls by studying the forces



acting on its individual components: gravity, friction, air resistance, intercellular adhesion, the stiffness of the cell walls, and so on.

In this article I will use the term "theory" in a broad sense, to denote any claim which purports to describe the nature of the world, whether it be an hypothesis (which has yet to be tested by experiment), a physical law (expressed by an equation which describes the relationships between physical quantities, and supported by experimental evidence), a scientific theory (like a law except broader and not as detailed, also supported by experimental evidence), or a religious doctrine. These are all descriptions of the world, differing mainly in their scope and in the amount of confidence we can have in them; I will lump them all together under one common name when convenient, though I will sometimes use the word "claim" if I want to emphasize a theory's unverified status.

There are several ways to do science, but they all usually involve some variation on the following sequence of activities:

**1. Pick a question to try to answer:** Perhaps inspired by observation of some natural phenomenon, or perhaps because someone posed a question, a scientist will get interested in the Why or How of something.

**2. Research the question:** The next step is usually to search the previously published scientific reports (collectively known as "the literature") to find out if the problem has been addressed before and, if so, who studied it and what kinds of answers did they get. This helps avoid the embarrassment of spending a lot of time and money investigating a problem, only to have someone say, "I knew that already, and if only you had read my paper you could have known it, too." It's also to get ideas on how to approach the problem; many scientific reports describe mere improvements on existing theories rather than brand new theories created from scratch.

**3. Make observations and collect data:** The researcher may conduct experiments or go into the field to observe the phenomenon being studied.

**4. Formulate a theory to explain the observed data:** Based on their understanding of the world and the

ideas discovered during the background research, the researcher comes up with a theory to explain the observations made so far. This is a highly creative process; there are no formulas and few guidelines on how to do it successfully except that the researcher is aware of the criteria that will be used to evaluate the theory in the next stage.

**5. Critically evaluate the theory:** This is one of the major points that distinguish modern science from its precursors and from other philosophical activities. Up until just a few centuries ago, European science was an armchair activity, the philosophical ramblings of learned men who were schooled in the wisdom of the ancient writers of Greece and Rome. The notion that they should actually go outside and look at the world to see if their conclusions were correct was a radical proposal and they resoundingly ridiculed and even persecuted the early proponents of experimentation, especially when their observations contradicted the prevailing theories.

A lot has changed in the intervening centuries. Nowadays, most theories have to pass stringent tests in order to be widely accepted by the scientific community. They are evaluated according to many criteria, some of which are listed below:

- ♦ Agreement with, and explanation of, existing data. Any new theory should help us make sense of previously unexplained observations, or it should shed new light on phenomena we thought we understood.
- ♦ Improvement over existing theory. Being merely another way of looking at things is not usually good enough to get a new theory accepted. It should offer some advantage over old theories, such as more accurate predictions or applicability to a wider range of phenomena.
- ♦ Accuracy of predictions of future observations. Experimental verification of theory is crucial to science because, basically, we are free to create whatever theories our imaginations can dream up, but only a few of them are accurate models of the real world. The traditional way to try to separate the wheat from the chaff is to use the theory to make a prediction about what will happen in a certain situation, then set up that situation or wait for it to occur, and see if the

prediction comes true. (But there is a caveat, as described in the section on falsifiability in the next installment.)

- ♦ Repeatability of the experimental results. If you're the only one who can do the experiment and get the results your theory predicts then it's likely that you're somehow skewing the results, either fraudulently or subconsciously. If you do the experiment once and get the desired results, but all future efforts yield different results, then odds are you made a mistake of some sort the first time. Scientists really want to eliminate these sources of error so they insist that any experimental result must be reproducible by others.
- ♦ Consistency. Does the theory contain any internal contradictions, or does it contradict some other widely accepted theory? If so, it will be much harder to convince people that it is true.
- ♦ Generality. A theory that successfully explains a wider variety of phenomena and shows underlying connections between apparently disparate phenomena is more highly prized than one that explains only a few phenomena in certain restricted situations. Scientists have a sense of intellectual economy which leads them to prefer to have fewer, more general theories as opposed to a proliferation of small theories which divide the world into a collection of special cases.
- ♦ Aesthetic qualities: simplicity, elegance, symmetry, and that certain *je ne sais quois*. The concept of beauty has a place in science. Some theories really are prettier than others. Those that reveal patterns are more appealing than those that consist of a random collection of rules with no apparent connection to each other. Theories requiring fewer *ad hoc* assumptions are likewise more satisfying.
- ♦ The researcher's reputation. Social and political factors also play a role in how readily a theory is accepted. If the person proposing the theory has a history of easily discredited work then their new proposal is less likely to be taken seriously, however sound it may be. And the farther the new theory is from the mainstream of scientific thought, the better the reputation the researcher

needs to have in order to effectively promote it, and the stronger the evidence must be to convince the scientific community.

- ♦ Falsifiability. This is probably *the* most crucial criterion. Without it, no theory could ever be proven false. The entire next section of this article is devoted to the issue of falsifiability.

**6. Repeat steps 1 through 5:** Science is a never ending process of successive approximation to the truth. The researcher may move on and explore other questions, or may continue to try to refine this theory. Other researchers may give attention to the same question and come up with competing theories, one of which will eventually replace this one.

I have painted a picture of science as practiced by honest, dedicated people working in good faith to find the genuine truths about the world around them. This is the Platonic Ideal of Science, science as it ought to be, and often is as a matter of fact. But science also falls short of this ideal when practiced by flesh and blood, imperfect people. As with any human endeavour, many of the usual foibles that taint society can be found in the practice of science as well: the temptations of fame and glory, power and money; fraud and deceit; prejudice and closed-mindedness; just name it and it can probably be found somewhere. In the next installment I plan to take a peek at the darker side of science, in addition to exploring the concept of falsifiability in some depth.

### Message From the Editors

We hope you are as excited about the upcoming 1996 MUFON Symposium as we are. We invited the several noted Georgia researchers to contribute articles covering various aspects of ufology. They responded with enthusiasm.

We want to thank everyone who has helped make the Georgia Sky Watch a success by contributing their talents and time. In alphabetical order they are: Jim Clifford, Leigh and Lynn Culver, Susan Daniel, S. Christopher Early, George Fawcett, Susanna Felder, Michael Hitt, Ed Komarek, Michael Norris, Henry Owens, Kelley Owens, Joye Pugh, Roberta Puhalski and John Thompson.



**Book review***Aliens from Space: The Real Story of Unidentified Flying Objects*

by Major Donald E. Keyhoe (USMC Ret.)  
Doubleday & Co., Garden City, NY, 1973.

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reviewed by Susanna Felder

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The people of the world owe Mr. Keyhoe a debt of gratitude for the work he did as Executive Director of NICAP (National Investigations Committee for Aerial Phenomena), from 1957 to 1972. During that time he was a tireless champion for rational, open, scientific investigation of UFO sightings, as well as a courageous leader in the often discouraging battle to counter government secrecy, disinformation, character assassination and slander, about the existence of UFOs.

This book builds on that period of intense activity and documents UFO sightings as far back as the 1940s, but the strength of the book is the coverage of the events of the '50s and '60s. Keyhoe was in a strategic position during that period to know what was going on, and was able to tap a wide network of contacts in the military from his years as an officer, pilot, and writer in the Marine Corps. By the time he retired as Executive Director, in 1972, NICAP was the lead organization gathering information about UFOs, taking witnesses seriously, and being honest with the public.

Since the official disinformation has been so strong and so consistent for more than 40 years, we have the peculiar situation now of widespread belief in UFOs at the grassroots level, with official denial and institutional disbelief stronger than ever.

It is doubly important for those of us working to build MUFON's credibility, and to promote the rational gathering of evidence and keeping of records about UFO sightings, to know our history and be able to learn from the experiences of our predecessors.

We stand now on the shoulders of men like Donald Keyhoe, and every field investigator for MUFON should read this book. It is indispensable, both for the ample documentation of UFO sightings by a wide range of very highly qualified witnesses, such as FAA

controllers, Air Force/Navy/Marine pilots, and commercial pilots, as well as for the careful, calm, honest account of the history of the official campaign of disinformation, how it got started, how the CIA took over in 1953, and how often, over the years, the official tissue of lies almost came undone.

The funniest "almost" came in 1968, when there was a national "flap", a wave of sightings by city police, newsmen, public officials, and others who could not easily be dismissed as cranks or fools. The Air Force debunked away as fast as they could, with the usual "natural" explanations — it was a shooting star, the planet Venus, swamp gas, etc. The debunking was having the effect of just shutting people up, as Keyhoe knew, because witnesses were still calling the NICAP office and freely admitting that they had no desire to report anything to the Air Force.

Then on April 16, 1968, Henry Ford II, aboard a Ford Co. executive plane, in the company of several other company executives, witnessed his first UFO. They were flying at 35,000 feet, in the vicinity of Austin TX, when the pilots sighted a huge round object overhead. Because of its size, they first thought it was a research balloon. But the object was flying along with them, matching their ground speed of 616 mph. One senior pilot later reported to NICAP: "It looked twice the size of a DC-8... Our guess was that it was 500 to 600 feet in diameter. There were no protrusions or windows." *The UFO paced the jet for almost an hour, and everyone on the plane got a good look, including Henry Ford II !!*

When the plane got back to Detroit, Mr. Ford gave a full report to the press, and asked the senior pilot to report the UFO to the Air Force, but the pilot begged off, saying he did not want to be ridiculed by the AF. *The Detroit News* broke the whole story, and the national press at the Pentagon descended on the Air Force, demanding an explanation. The AF was stuck: they couldn't ridicule Henry Ford II, or call it a hoax, or say the witnesses were having hallucinations. So they stalled, with the last resort of a diehard stonewall job: "No Comment."

Naturally, this did not satisfy anyone. But read the book to see what happened next. Dirty tricks and aggressive debunking by the AF months later prevented a congressional investigation, and the "flap" died a natural death when the number of sightings slowed down.

But it is wonderful to know the story, and Keyhoe does a good job on all levels. The book could easily have been twice as long, given how much evidence he had and how much UFO activity there was during his tenure as Executive Director of NICAP. He does a good job of telling each story with just enough details to make what happened clear.

One of the most interesting aspects of the book for me is the careful way Keyhoe gives you technical information.

For instance, an early case in NICAP's files was a sighting on April 6, 1948 by Navy missile trackers using a theodolite, which tracked an oval-shaped UFO at 18,000 mph, and registered a high-speed climb in altitude of 25 miles in 10 seconds. It was sightings like this, with very accurate measurements, that set off the search for an anti-gravity or gravity-neutralizing technology.

Keyhoe also gives good historical information. For example, in 1952, there were more than 1000 sightings reported in the U.S. as UFOs were seen maneuvering over cities, airports, military bases and nuclear power plants. This was a big increase over previous years. It was in July of 1952, that UFO's flew over the White House, the Capitol building, the Washington airport, and other parts of Washington, DC. They were seen by thousands of people, yet the AF stuck to its story that all such sightings were hallucinations, and that the equally well-witnessed interceptor flights, numbering in the hundreds, were chasing objects that had "natural" explanations.

A great strength of the book is the consistency with which Keyhoe gives you the details you need to see how well-documented these thousands of cases were, and how very credible the witnesses were. One case stands out here: On July 2, 1952, a Naval Aviation photographer, Warrant Officer Delbert Newhouse, was driving with his wife to his new post in Utah, when they saw a group of 12 to 14 UFOs maneuvering at high speed overhead. Newhouse had his equipment with him — a Bell & Howell movie camera with a 3-inch telephoto lens and already loaded with film. He was able to shoot about 40 feet of film before the UFOs flew out of sight.

The Secretary of the Navy at that time, Dan Kimball, had recently had his own clear-as-day sighting of a UFO, and was no friend of the AF cover-up policy. He ordered that the film be turned over to Navy

investigators, for thorough analysis, with only a copy to be sent to the AF. It took the Navy examiners three months, but they were able, with full technical back-up, to rule out all conventional explanations, and come to only one conclusion: these were "unidentified flying objects under intelligent control". Kimball was of a mind to go public and make a strong case against the censorship. If a presidential election had not been held that year, he might have been able to do it.

As it was, he did not have time, and was out of office after the election. The AF had been very worried about what the Navy was prepared to do and the quality of their evidence, and it was because of this that the CIA decided to step in and take over the cover-up and proceed with hard-boiled, ruthless censorship, a move which they engineered in 1953.

What is important about Keyhoe's book is that it shows how many military people, some very high ranking, and including many AF officers and pilots, had seen UFOs, knew what they saw, were not happy with the AF debunking and cover-up, and made their stories known to NICAP, as well as cooperated in various attempts to end the government secrecy.

One last story from 1952: during a practice flight over the Gulf of Mexico, the crew of an Air Force bomber tracked a UFO formation going 5240 mph. While they watched, another formation of UFOs swung in behind the bomber, slowed to pace the aircraft, then raced up to join the first group. Within seconds, the smaller UFOs of both groups had merged with a giant ship which suddenly appeared on the bomber's radar. As soon as the smaller craft were taken aboard the larger ship, it accelerated to a speed of over 9000 mph and went off the radar. Later, the size of the large carrier ship was estimated to be at least 1200 feet long. And this is only one of many reports of small ships merging with a huge carrier ship. The report was passed on to Keyhoe in early 1953, before the CIA took over the cover-up operation.

It's too bad this book is out of print, though you can get it, in paperback or hardback, from a book search service. One hopes that NICAP's files have been well-preserved, and that the wonderful richness of our history will one day be told.

*[ed. note: The J. Allen Hynek Center for UFO Studies inherited the files after NICAP disbanded.]*