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Hynek 12/17/66 Sat. Eve. Post article - Pt. 1

From: Jerry Cohen <rjcohen@li.net>
Date: Tue, 15 Dec 1998 22:06:42 -0400
Fwd Date: Wed, 16 Dec 1998 10:16:52 -0500
Subject: Hynek 12/17/66 Sat. Eve. Post article - Pt. 1

"Spock put his hands to McCoy's head
and whispered 'Remember!' "

This is the 12/17/66 Saturday Evening Post article that fully ignited the controversy that still exists today. In it, Dr. Hynek speaks about his years examining the UFO phenomenon and insight into why he finally decided to publish this letter.

A URL for a brief summation of the article will appear at the end of this two-part post as well as some links to quotes from Hynek's "The UFO Experience," in which he explains the reasons & depth of his disagreement with the Air Force.

Begin Sat. Eve. Post article - Pt. 1:

ARE FLYING SAUCERS REAL? By J. Allen Hynek

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

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

So begins a truly puzzling UFO report--one that is not explainable as it now stands by such familiar causes as a balloon, aircraft, satellite or meteor. "When the UFO climbed, the static stopped," stated the report made by the base's director of operations. "The UFO began to swoop and dive. It then appeared to land ten to fifteen miles south of the area. Missile-site control sent a strike team (well-armed Air Force guards) to check. When the team was about ten miles from the landing site, static disrupted radio contact with them. Five to eight minutes later the glow diminished, and the UFO took off. Another UFO was visually sighted and confirmed by radar. The one that was first sighted passed beneath the second. Radar also confirmed this. The first made for altitude toward the north, and the second seemed to disappear with the glow of red."

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

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

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

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

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

The public, I am certain, wants to know what to believe--what can be believed--about the "flying saucer" stories that seem to be growing more sensational all the time. With all loyalty to the Air Force, and with a deep appreciation of its problems, I now feel it my duty to discuss the UFO mystery fully and frankly. I speak as a scientist with unique experience. To the best of my knowledge, I am the only scientist who has spent nearly 20 years monitoring the UFO situation in this and other countries and who has also read many thousands of reports and personally interviewed many sighters of UFO's.

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

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

consultant's fee than with disclosing the truth to the public.

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

Another typical letter declared: "In spite of the fact that the [Air Force] claims (or is instructed to claim) that UFO's do not exist, I think that common sense tells most of us that they do. There have been too many responsible people through the years that have had terrifying experiences involving UFO's. I think our Government insults the intelligence of our people in keeping information regarding UFO's from them."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

By 1952 my feeling that the Air Force was not investigating the reports seriously enough led me to write a paper suggesting that the subject deserved much closer study. In 1953 the Air Force did give UFO's more attention, although not nearly enough, to my mind. A panel of some of the top scientists in the country was assembled under the direction of Howard P. Robertson, a distinguished physicist from Cal Tech. The Robertson panel discussed UFO's for four days. Most of the cases, incidentally, were not as puzzling as some of the ones we have now. What was more, the panel was given only 15 reports for detailed study out of the several hundred that had been made up to that time, although it did quickly review many others. This was akin to asking Madame Curie to examine a small fraction of the pitchblende she distilled and still expecting her to come out with radium.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Wonderland flavor for comfort."

It was about this time that some firm believers in UFO's became disgusted with the Air Force and decided to take matters into their own hands, much like the vigilantes of the Old West; they organized "to do the job the Air Force was mishandling." These groups composed of people with assorted backgrounds, were often the recipients of intriguing reports that never came to the official attention of Project Blue Book. The first group of this kind in the United States was the APRO (Aerial Phenomena Research Organization), founded in 1952 and still going strong, as is NICAP (National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena) which was organized several years later.

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

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

Continued in "Hynek 12/17/66 Sat. Eve. Post article.2"

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