

## Primer: History<sup>1</sup>

The UFO Phenomenon as we know it began in the late 1940's, coincident with the end of WW II and the development of nuclear energy and advanced military technology. Some people see meaning in this coincidence, whether their favored theories involve extraterrestrials, misperceived secret technology or unclassified mental phenomena brought by the stress of the world. Others have tried to uncover UFO evidence or stories dating back into the 1800's (the great airship mystery of 1896-7)<sup>2</sup> or even to the dawn of civilization (Mesopotamian Creation myths, and the Bible )<sup>3</sup> Most serious students of UFOlogy either discount the relevance of these earlier accounts or regard them with mild interest. The UFO Phenomenon which began in the late forties, however, is viewed quite differently. Almost immediately it was seen as a major mystery which seemed not to have a real cultural matrix or precedent from which it sprung, and it did not seem to respond to happenings in popular culture as a sociologically driven phenomenon would. Rather, it seemed to be operating independently.

The public entrance of the phenomenon occurred with the Kenneth Arnold sighting of several disks with anomalous motions flying over Washington's western Rockies in 1947. Almost immediately, large numbers of witnesses began having sightings of various geometric objects, which bore little if any relation in form or behavior to known aerial technologies. The USAF was naturally interested and began active study in mid-1947. Around that same time reports surfaced of a "saucer crash" and recovery by the military. This was eminently understandable as the military had announced the story themselves. Quickly, higher offices quashed the press release and announced an alternative story: that of a crashed weather balloon. To this day the thesis persists that the original story was correct and that the matter maintains the highest secrecy.<sup>4</sup> The Roswell, New Mexico case seems fantastic, but investigations continue today and have continued to corroborate it, rather than shake it apart.

Whatever the ultimate resolution of Roswell, as Sherlock Holmes would say: "the game was afoot," and investigative sparring between civilians and government became a lasting feature of this subject. In 1948 the USAF hired (then) Ohio State astronomer, and famed textbook writer, J. Allen Hynek as its public investigator. Thus, as a paid skeptic, the most famous and influential personage in UFO research entered the field. Early investigations seemed to indicate that some of these "objects" were not made by known governments, friend or foe, but that they posed no threat either. But in 1952 there was an intensive wave of sightings which included two nights when for hours objects moved through restricted air space over the White House, the Pentagon and the Capitol. An energetic head of the USAF investigation unit, Captain Edward Ruppelt, was aggressively pursuing these cases.<sup>5</sup> The CIA was concerned and created a short-term "think-tank," called the Robertson Panel, in 1953. The panel had one relevant finding: UFO phenomena are not dangerous, perhaps not even "real" in some sense of that word, but UFO reports and the phenomena could be manipulated in ways which could endanger the security of the nation. The subject must be emotionally de-fused. As UFOlogy's prime historian, Dr. David Jacobs of Temple University, would write:

"This determination became the single most influential event in the governmental study of UFOs. . . From 1953 onward the primary Air Force activity was to try to identify as many reports as possible and to educate the public that all reports could be explained, in the hopes that the reports would then cease. All cases were to be identified regardless of the actual content of the report"<sup>6</sup>

During this same period there developed the second major hurdle to serious UFO research,

the appearance of a somewhat different sort of "hysteria" than the government was girding against: the "contactees." In the 1950's, several individuals "revealed" sporadic or constant contact with aliens from UFOs. These aliens were alleged to be great friends and even saviors from Space.<sup>7</sup> They asked their appointed missionaries to preach a gospel of anti-war, anti-nuclear, peaceful family hood of all humanity. Along with these idealistic, radical but mostly healthy messages came all sorts of other strange concepts and scientific nonsense. Contactees were easy to ridicule, and it was similarly easy to apply this ridicule with a broad brush to the entire phenomenon. Witnesses shut up and respectable researchers, fearing for their professional lives, went underground. Dr. Jacques Vallee was later to refer to these silent academics as the "Invisible College."<sup>8</sup>

As mentioned previously, the phenomenon does not seem to correlate itself well with public events and attitudes, and at the height of this ridicule and disinformation there was another wave in 1957. Citizen groups such as the Aerial Phenomena Research Organization, and the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (headed by Major Donald Keyhoe) now began openly to complain that the government was involved in a cover-up. This charge has since proven true to everyone's satisfaction through documents obtained by Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).<sup>9</sup> There is no debate that information was and is being held, only whether that information pertains to anything extraordinarily anomalous or "merely" mundane national security and high technology matters. Two sidelights to this upsurge of activity in the late fifties were: a) the subject attracted the attention of the great psychologist, C. G. Jung, who wrote a book attempting to explain the phenomena in terms of Archetypes and projected needs/stresses of the public,<sup>10</sup> and b) the strange Brazilian case of Antonio Villa Boas, who reported the first instance of what later came to be known as an "abduction" encounter, involving sexual matters. Naturally, at the time, the case was rejected as being too bizarre to be taken seriously.

In 1961 one of the "classics" of UFOlogy, the famed Betty and Barney Hill abduction case was reported. Its unusual character, double witnesses, physical effects, a world-renown hypnotist doing that aspect of the investigation, and a "Star Map" which made good scientific sense to some researchers, made this perhaps the most commented upon case in the field<sup>11</sup> It became the prototype for abduction imagery (perhaps unfortunately, as its vivid and widely publicized images make later "independent" reports problematical).

In 1965 another wave began. And the following year three things of varying significance, each noteworthy in different ways occurred. One, the U.S. Congress called for an investigation of UFOs which resulted in the notorious "Condon UFO Study Project"<sup>12</sup> Two, major UFO debunker Phillip Klass wrote his first book<sup>13</sup> Three, J. Allen Hynek completed his transformation from paid skeptical investigator to concerned scientist confronting an obvious anomaly. Dr. Edward U. Condon's project followed the Air Force scenario as laid down by the Robertson Committee. Internal documents later revealed that it had no intention of actually researching the phenomena in a scientific manner (i.e., objectively). Peculiarly, however, the Report, issued in 1969, while stating that there is nothing particularly anomalous or scientifically interesting in the data, presents in the body of the document many cases which make a strong opposite argument for anyone choosing to read the material (or the stated conclusions of the lower echelon investigators). Nevertheless, this report pronounced the death knell for the official USAF Project (Bluebook), and Allen Hynek left to found a serious scientific organization to continue the work: the Center for UFO Studies. Phillip Klass went on to scourge the UFO community, case-by-case across the years, and still serves today as the main force in a small band of active debunkers. Subtly, an independent movement was growing in established academia which would play an indirect role in UFOlogy: astronomers and others were becoming openly interested in the Search for Extra-terrestrial Intelligence (SETI) and an

active debate was emerging.<sup>14</sup>

Despite Condon, et. al., the UFO phenomena had become more concrete (with increasing ground traces, electro-magnetic effects, photos, occupant reports)<sup>15</sup>, and thereby less easy to ignore. This and the outrage over the scientific irregularities of the Condon Project inspired well-known scientists Carl Sagan and Thornton Page to edit a (mainly negative) set of research and opinion papers by scholars of many fields from a AAAS symposium in 1969.<sup>16</sup> A book appeared in 1972 coincident with the major work on the field by Hynek as a counterbalance.<sup>17</sup> In 1973 there was another wave.

With Hynek's Center for UFO Studies leading the way, the standards for UFO research rose, data was organized on the computer file UFOCA T, a national network of civilian observer-investigators was formed (the Mutual UFO Network), and the push to demand release of declassified documents through FOIA began in earnest. Other developments in the seventies saw the rise in academic enthusiasm for SETI and the emergence of doubts in the minds of some UFO researchers about the ET-hypothesis (once again indicating that mainstream academia and UFO research were marching to different drummers). Certain researchers, though convinced that they had a major anomaly on their hands, were beginning to show concern over the "immaterial" behavior of some "objects" as well as their apparent "staging" for the witnesses. Some theorists turned to bizarre unclassified socio-psychological explanations; others saw "psychic/paranormal" involvement; still others "ultraterrestrial" ("parallel realities," other dimensional temporal displacement. . . et. al.) possible explanations. Regarding the latter, intriguing correlations with old folkloric tales and entities were pointed out (first prominently by Vallee in 1969).<sup>18</sup>

Most researchers rejected these more "supranormal" views as dangerous diversions and pushed forward their investigations with a variety of hypotheses in mind (ETs, unclassified physical phenomena, unclassified psychological phenomena, etc.). To aid civilian investigators and to attempt to raise and standardize primary case studies to higher levels, both major organizations (Hynek's Center and the Network) worked to provide interested parties with necessary insight and protocol. Allan Hendry wrote a classic Handbook in 1979.<sup>19</sup> In a last note about the seventies, the decade saw a series of blockbuster movies including the UFO film par excellence, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. True to form the UFO phenomenon did not respond. Cases did not explode as sociological theorists predicted; they dropped. Friendly cuddly aliens did not show up in CE III reports; rather cold uncaring ones. The social hysteria or mass programming hypothesis failed again to match events with predictions. In its simplistic form this once attractive hypothesis now seems irrelevant. However, for one "data cluster" which would grow in importance in the following decade it is again a live alternative.

The 1980's and 90's saw some continuance of the pattern of earlier years and two major changes. The continuances are that:

1. in select areas research professionalism continued to increase and discussion of the subject proceeded on a higher plane. Most hopeful of these developments include the founding of the Fund for UFO Research, the Society for Scientific Exploration (an organization of Ph.D. scholars with academic or research institute jobs), and two scholarly journals wherein responsible research may be published (the Society's Journal of Scientific Exploration, and the Center's Journal of UFO Studies), and, overseas, a major government-supported UFO research agency in France (GEPAN, now known as SEPRA);

2. citizen groups continued to push for release of UFO-related government documents through FOIA;
3. networking grew in the U.S. and overseas between civilians and "invisible collegians" due to the still general non-support of UFO research officially;
4. most academics remained unaware of the depth of information and the anomalous nature of the field, despite the strongly emerging academic belief in the prevalence of advanced life elsewhere among the relevant scholars of SETI Research;<sup>20</sup> and, oddly, a ridicule factor still persists despite this changing paradigm;
5. the debunking element of UFOlogy continued its work in interestingly successful fashion',<sup>21</sup> and somehow managed to obscure the critical scientific point in all of this: that discoveries of some sort exist in this data (even if "just" astonishing new psychology, geophysics, and/or meteorology).

The two major changes in this period have been particularly significant:

1. the numbers of "classical" cases dropped drastically. Almost absent (relatively) are the old "daylight disks", radar cases, and close encounters. Instead there come:
2. an avalanche of alleged "abduction" reports, so many that the flow has buried the few researchers involved. Some people see this as a fundamental change in the UFO phenomenon. Others see it as the first real "sociological" response to media and pop culture imagery. As media has made the "abduction" concept better known, the stream of claimants has grown torrentially. There are two views of this, as well: the awareness stimulated real cases to come forward vs. the awareness stimulated odd psychological responses. Theorists of the latter view see the deluge as probably having nothing to do with classical UFO's at all. Countering that opinion are the abduction counselor/researchers who insist that many details reported independently by "abductees" have never been published and are so odd as to be beyond coincidence. They add cases of independent multiple witnesses and physical effects to buttress their belief in a concrete phenomenon. The leader of this school of thought, Budd Hopkins, published two influential books in this. Missing Time (1981)<sup>22</sup> and Intruders (1987)<sup>23</sup>. The level of media excitement and hype arising coincident with these volumes (and other more questionable writings by other authors) has been unprecedented in UFOlogy, and has colored its current reception in all arenas, not necessarily to the good. Again, however, the major scientific point has been obscured: whether the flood of alleged abductees have had an extraterrestrial experience or "just" an astoundingly similar life wrenching psychological phenomenon of worldwide proportions, something very important lies in this data to be discovered<sup>24</sup>.

Endnotes:

1. This historical primer owes much to a similar condensed UFO history given in a talk to the Mutual UFO Network Symposium in Washington, D. C. by Dr. David Jacobs (1987). The text of that talk has been printed in the symposium proceedings as follows: Jacobs, David M. "From Arnold to Hynek: The End of an Era". MUFON Symposium Proceedings. 1987. pp. 119-129. Seguin. Tx.
2. Cohen, Daniel. The Great Airship Mystery. N. Y., Dodd, Mead. 1981.

3. von Daniken, Erich. Chariots of the Gods? N. Y., Putnam. 1969. and Sitchin, Zechariah. The Twelfth Planet. N. Y., Avon. 1976.
4. Randle, Kevin and Schmitt, Donald. UFO Crash at Roswell
5. Ruppelt, Edward J. The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects. Garden City, N. Y.; Doubleday. 1956.
6. Jacobs, op. cit., p. 123
7. If interested in the flavor of these claims, see Leslie, Desmond and George Adamski. Flying Saucers Have Landed. London; Werner Laurie. 1953; or Bethurum, Truman. Aboard a Flying Saucer. Los Angeles; DeVorss. 1954.
8. Vallee, Jacques. The Invisible College. N. Y.; Dutton. 1975.
9. Faucett, Lawrence and Barry J. Greenwood. Clear Intent. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.; Prentice-Hall. 1984.
10. Jung, C. G. Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies. N. Y.; Harcourt, Brace. 1959. and for the Villas Boas Case: Creighton, Gordon. "The Amazing Case of Antonio Villas Boas", in Charles Bowen (ed.), The Humanoids. Chicago; Henry Regnery. 1969. pp. 200-238.
11. For the Complete Story of The Hill Case: Fuller, John. The Interrupted Journey. N. Y.; Dial. 1966; and For the Analysis/Debate of The "Star Map", see: Dickinson, Terence. "The Zeta Reticuli Incident". a special publication by Astronomy magazine. Milwaukee, Astro. Media. 1976. (with related commentary by Carl Sagan, Marjorie Fish, David Saunders, et al.)
12. Gilmore, Daniel S. (ed.). Scientific Study of Unidentified Flying Objects ("The Condon Report"). N. Y.; Bantam. 1969.
13. Klass, Philip J. UFO'S Identified. N. Y.; Random House. 1968.
14. Shklovskii, I. S. and Carl Sagan. Intelligent Life in the Universe. San Francisco; Holden Day. 1966; and Sagan, Carl (ed.). Communication with Extraterrestrial Intelligence. Cambridge, Mass.; MIT Press. 1973.
15. For the increased concreteness of UFO evidence and research, see articles by Maccabee, Johnson, Rodeghier, Schuessler et al. analyzing photographic and physical effect evidence in Hynek, Mimi (ed.). The Spectrum of UFO Research. Chicago; J. Allen Hynek Center for UFO Studies. 1988. For the counter-argument to the Condon Project report see: Saunders, David R. and R. Roger Harkins. UFO'S? YES! N. Y.; Signet, 196\_. (by a scientist on the project offering a dissident insider's view).\_; and Michael Swords. "The University of Colorado UFO Project", Journal of UFO Studies, n.s. 6:149-184. 1995/1996
16. Sagan, Carl and Thornton Page (eds.). UFO'S, a Scientific Debate. Ithaca, N. Y.; Cornell. 1972.
17. Hynek, I. Allen. The UFO Experience: A Scientific Inquiry. Chicago: Henry Regnery. 1972.
18. Vallee, Jacques. Passport to Magonia. Chicago: Henry Regnery. 1969.
19. Hendry, Allan. The UFO Handbook. N. Y.; Doubleday. 1979.
20. The explosion of this thinking is remarkable and the literature beyond listing. Beyond the most visible commentator (Carl Sagan) are many other scientists worth reading. One prominent insightful researcher is Boston University astronomer, Michael Papagiannis. For a sampling of his thought see: "Are We All Alone, or Could They Be in the Asteroid Belt?". Quarterly Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society, 19:277-81. 1978.

21. Klass, Philip J. UFO'S Explained. N. Y.; Random House. 1974.; and Oberg, James E. UFO'S and Outer Space Mysteries. Norfolk; Downing. 1982.
22. Hopkins, Budd. Missing Time. N. Y.; Marels. 1981.
23. Hopkins, Budd. Intruders. N. Y.; Random House. 1987.
24. Klass, Philip I. Abductions: A Dangerous Game. Buffalo, N. Y.; Prometheus. 1988; is an example of this “debunk-everything-at-all-costs” approach, even to the ignorance of genuinely interesting anomalies therein. For a more intellectually open and honest approach to this difficult area see: David A. Pritchard. Alien Discussions. (Proceedings of the Abductions Conference at MIT)