
AS GREAT AN ENIGMA AS THE UFOs THEMSELVES

BY MICHAEL D. SWORDS

We've been in the UFO research business for a long time now, and probably all of us who read *IUR* are convinced that this statement is true: "A large number of witnesses have observed apparently technological devices in the skies that have occasionally landed on the ground and are in no way explainable by mundane natural or current human technology." When I'm asked the naïve, misleading, and rather stupid question, "Do you believe in UFOs?" I say that I won't bother responding to that, but if you want to ask me if I believe in something like the statement above, I say "No, I don't believe that. I *know* it to be true."

I know it to be true because there are so many cases in which the quality and humility of the witnesses, the details observed, the convincing contexts of the sightings, the surprises in the "little things" reported, and the absence of other embellishments when those would be so easy to add, produce a powerful and undeniable set of narratives that are simply and overwhelmingly inexplicable.

Meditating on this while browsing through three terrific resources for the UFO scholar (Loren Gross's series titled *UFOs: A History*; Tom Tulien's oral history project videotapes; and the personal files of James McDonald), the enigma of the title of this article crystallized for me. Why hasn't this problem—that apparently technological objects have graced our skies—been dispensed with long ago? The question of whether there really are UFOs should have been set aside as a no-brainer almost as soon as the phenomenon began flapping in 1947.

For some of those first individuals who seriously tried to study it, it was. For George Garrett in July 1947 in the Pentagon, the disks were real. For Howard "Mac" McCoy at Wright-Patterson AFB in the summer of 1947, the same was true. For those in Project Sign, likewise, and Dewey Fournet, at the Pentagon's UFO intelligence desk—to say nothing of Donald Keyhoe, Coral Lorenzen, Isabel Davis, and on and on. But in 2005 a debate still exists, and we are generally on the losing side as portrayed by media, academia, and the government. Pat answers to this enigma are not very cogent. This isn't a simple cover-up or the Robertson Panel.

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At a Center for UFO Studies board meeting, Jerry Clark said to me that as of the early summer of 1952, this matter should have been settled once and for all. He was, in part, thinking of the Nash-Fortenberry incident. I agreed. In fact, I thought that it should have been settled even earlier. (Note that neither Jerry nor I were adding Roswell into this equation. Why? Speaking for myself, Roswell could well have been managed uniquely; that is, buried in a level of secrecy and cloaked handling where almost no one was privy to any of the details. It was not only secret to the public, but was also closed to the general intelligence community. As such, it would remain in a perpetual gray area, whether you believed in it or not. But regular cases, like Nash-Fortenberry, were completely out of the can, in the open, and could not be rationally denied.)

Previous to Nash-Fortenberry, one recalls the General Mills balloon cases of Charles Moore, Commander Robert McLaughlin, J. J. Kaliszewski, among others. Those incidents should have ended the debate as well, given the caliber of the witnesses, back in the late 1940s. And even, on reflection, so should the Kenneth Arnold case and a few others of that time, such as Captain E. J. Smith. These should have ended the matter in July 1947 and, as we've seen with Garrett and McCoy, they did. So why is the matter still debated, and the question not answered, in 2005?

THE EDWARDS AIR FORCE BASE FILM

What inspired this hair-puller was the May 3, 1957, Edwards AFB case, first noticed by Max Miller in his *Saucers* magazine, then pursued, as usual, by James McDonald and then immortalized in print and video by Loren Gross and Tom Tulien. Perhaps *IUR* readers are familiar with the case, but I'll bet many of you are not. It is another powerhouse case, another debate-ender, in my view. Here's how it went:

On the morning of May 3, 1957, the supervisor of civilian camera operators at Edwards AFB in California's Mojave Desert, Frank E. Baker, sent the standard two-man crews out to their Askania tracking telescopes for their 8–5 shifts. A normal day for the teams would be photographing airplanes on speed runs to accurately measure their velocities, or to film a dummy bomb drop, or perhaps even the U-2 high-altitude spyplane. Previously the telescopes were



Various types of Askania tracking telescopes in use by the U.S. military.

calibrated by focusing on stars, and sometimes even by balloons deliberately launched for this purpose. The operators were familiar with all types of aerial technologies.

The master station for the telescope crews was 1½ miles outside the main area of Edwards, and the five telescope installations a little further into the surrounding desert. The crews drove out to their positions. Veterans James Bittick and Jack Gettys were in their pickup expecting a normal day. As they approached their station, they saw an object in the sky, shining brightly. It was, initially, at about 45° elevation and seemed to be hovering. Gettys, who was very interested in UFOs, immediately stated that they had a UFO on their hands.

The crew had to get permission from Baker before trying to photograph the object. So they called in, began readying the scope, loaded the film (as they would have done regardless to begin the day), and waited for the OK.

This interlude lasted for a few minutes while they worked at the scope and snuck peeks at the hovering object. Gettys, who looked through the side-mounted spotting scope, said that the base of object had a circular appearance when high in the sky. Bittick apparently didn't look at it through the spotting scope until it was lower in the sky, as he remembered only the side view.

The go-ahead from Baker came in time, and they began filming, each viewing the object through the spotting scopes

while the film rolled at a rapid pace (probably eight frames per second, as Bittick recounted to McDonald 10 years later). They shot about 100 feet and stopped. When they started filming, the object began to move away from its estimated distance of one mile. When they quit filming, it was about five miles distant, and its motion had been fast and steady with no wobbling.

What they saw was a disk-shaped object (a "cigar" from the side) with a low dome on top. Gettys felt the edges were more rounded, while Bittick thought them more pointed. The dome had little ports around it, perhaps five or six, and the device was spinning. It was shiny metallic in appearance, but whether it was gold in color or silver with the golden morning sunlight glinting off it was not obvious. Gettys thought it was definitely gold-colored. Guessing at its size, he thought it was "parking lot sized," about 100 feet in diameter. At no time did the men hear any engine sound from the UFO.



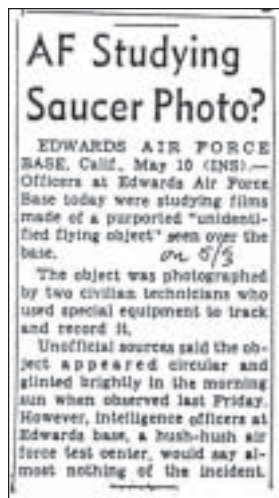
Gettys's memory of the UFO (10 years later)



Bittick's memory of the UFO (40+ years later)



Baker's memory of the UFO (10 years later), with hazy edges



Left, Los Angeles Times, May 9, 1957; right, New York Journal-American, May 10, 1957.

Gettys's account differs from Bittick's in only a few details. First, he said he could see the underside of the object, which was circular (planiform) when at its highest elevation angle. Also, he didn't see any ports on the dome.

They contacted the base and ultimately two jets were scrambled. By the time these came overhead, the UFO had disappeared in an easterly direction. The jets never caught up to it or even saw it.

After Gettys and Bittick turned in the film, it apparently stayed at Edwards to be developed, the normal procedure. Following the incident, possibly even the next work day, three officers showed up at Frank Baker's station: a major, a captain, and a lieutenant. Bittick and Gettys were interrogated separately, but their stories matched and neither

would back off what they had seen. The officers were insulting, suggesting that the desert sun does things to one's eyes (despite the fact that they had film), and wondering how late they'd been out the previous night or how long they'd been in the sun (despite the incident occurring at about 8 a.m.). Bittick got angry enough to turn to Frank Baker and ask: "Do I have to put up with this crap?" Reflecting back on this 49-odd years later, he told Tom Tulien, "It's a funny thing how they try to cover up what they know, and use a stupid answer for it."

The stupid answer was a balloon. Both men knew that it wasn't a balloon. Not only did they have the evidence of their eyes checked against the years of experience with the tracking telescope, but also there was the film itself. A friend of theirs who worked at Edwards knew the fellow who developed the Askania films. He got the guy to clip off a strip that he ultimately gave to Bittick (who kept it for several years then burned it because he shouldn't have had it in the first place). Other clips from the film apparently got to Baker as well. The film showed a cigar shape with a bump on top. (A few prints from the film are in the Blue Book files, but they seem to be more distant examples and are little more than light blobs. See them in Brad Steiger's 1976 paperback, *Project Blue Book*.) Baker later said that he saw closer photos that definitely showed what Bittick and Gettys claimed.

And, what about the balloon? Well, there *was* a balloon released from Edwards at about 7:40 a.m. on May 3. It was very well tracked. Lt. Col. Raymond Klein, the deputy chief of staff for operations at Edwards, compared it to what the observers saw and where they were located, and wrote: "Based on the above track made and the location of the observers at the time of the sighting [all known quantities], the weather balloon released at Edwards could not have been the unidentified object reported."

Jim McDonald rechecked the data and confirmed

Klein's analysis. Nevertheless, Project Blue Book wrote the incident off as a balloon with total disregard for the facts. Someone at Edwards may have been UFO-sympathetic, as the story was quickly leaked to California newspapers. The Air Force was very unhappy about this. The horse, thereby, was let out of the barn enough that we didn't entirely lose this case.

Well, there we are again: Expert, multiple witnesses and hundreds of frames of film. The deputy of staff for operations knows that it was not a balloon, and is thereby an unidentified physical object in the air near the base—just like Kaliszewski, Moore, and McLaughlin knew the same after their sightings. But, somehow, USAF intelligence refuses to know. And it can't be just Project Blue Book and an understaffed and not-a-little-incompetent project officer there. This information is passing through other offices as well, including Air Defense Command, the Air Force offices at the Pentagon, very probably the Office of Naval Research, and/or the Office of Naval Intelligence, and our friends in the CIA. And people inside these organizations are hearing about these expert-witness cases, here and there, in at least a constant trickle, if not a flow. Doesn't anyone have any memory? Doesn't an accumulation of anomalies build up in anyone's mind? Why doesn't this stuff stick anywhere? Of course, it sticks with us, but we obviously don't count.

AN EXPLANATION, PLEASE?

The explanation for this rather astounding selective amnesia is something that I'd very much like someone to clearly elucidate for me. What is it about an organization like USAF Intelligence, or the Pentagon, or the CIA, or a fuzzy concept like "the media" that allows something of this potential importance and clear evidence to be constantly fuzzed out of existence, despite incidents that just *can't* be so discarded? A colossal example: How can the General Mills balloon cases of the late 1940s and early 1950s not even be presented at the CIA's Robertson Panel in January 1953? My eyeballs start revolving independently in my skull if I think too long about that! If the most undeniable expert witness, multiple witness, device-recorded incidents are not even resident enough in the consciousnesses of Ruppelt, Fournet, or Hynek to bother to sell them to Robertson, what explains that?

I've bored my colleagues at CUFOS for several years with the statement that ufology is not a field of study because it never establishes anything. It has no real history, no foundation of "givens." This is despite Nash-Fortenberry, Father Gill, Lawrence Coyne, and the General Mills and Edwards AFB boys. But why aren't these "givens"? They are, for any intellectually honest student of the phenomenon, certainly "undeniables." But they don't stick together and they don't allow ufology to "stick" in the consciousness of the government, military, and academy. Please educate me on this, dear readers. ♦

UFO SIGHTINGS IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

This revised edition of Richard Hall's monograph on 21st-century UFO sightings is now available from CUFOS. This is a report for those who like to read about



sightings, showing that UFOs are still around and doing amazing things. Witnesses are seeing all the classic types of UFOs reported over the years, and there is a special section on large triangular objects. Send a check for \$12.00 (\$15.00 if you reside outside the U.S.) to CUFOS, 2457 W. Peterson, Chicago, IL 60659.