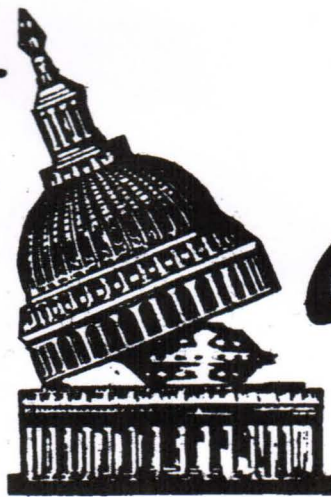


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THE 1952 SAUCER WAVE - A STORY BEHIND THE STORY?

One of the most extraordinary periods in the history of the UFO phenomena occurred during the summer of 1952. Literally thousands of flying saucer reports inundated the Air Force, police departments and newspapers with around-the-clock activity. Central to this wave of reports were sightings over Washington, D.C. Three major radar trackings of "unknowns" and a number of minor ones plagued Air Force and civilian air traffic controllers. Jets had to be scrambled to confront the invasion of radar pips. In some cases pilots did detect strange lights over the city but as quickly as they would appear the objects would disappear, leaving officials scratching their heads over what had happened. During this three-week stretch banner headlines alerted the nation to the return of the saucers (having been in the news at various times since 1947).

The Air Force statistics for this time were extraordinary. 1952 produced 1501 UFO incidents, the highest of any year of the Air Force's twenty-one year investigation. 303 of those were considered "unidentified" after investigation, also the highest of any year by a very large margin. The next highest was 1954 with a mere 46 unknowns of 487 reports (Project Blue Book Fact Sheet, 1968).

Beginning in April and through May and June 1952, sightings began a steady rise. Part of this could have been due to an article that appeared in the April 7th, 1952 issue of Life magazine called, "Have We Visitors from Outer Space" by H.B.Darrach and Robert Ginna. The article was an oddity itself in that it was done with Air Force cooperation and that it came very close to endorsing the notion of UFOs as extraterrestrial devices. Cases were declassified and released to the Life writers. The magazine arranged to forward sightings to the Air Force from Life's readers (The UFO Controversy in America by David Jacobs, 1975, pg.69). The Air Force's policy prior to this had been to discourage such thinking, that the phenomena was under control and that there was nothing to the idea of visitations by beings from space. The Life article was a virtual invitation for saucer interest to escalate.

Blue Book cases from April 16-30 totalled 54. May reports totalled 68 incidents. June reports increased again to 125. (Project Blue Book, Case Index, National Archives, 1976). When questioned by the press about the Life article, the Air Force did not issue the usual denial but instead

maintained that the article was correct and the conclusions were Life's (Jacobs, 1975).

Given the degree of encouragement to broadcasting saucer incidents, the Air Force must have expected to receive a rising influx of sightings. There had always been elements in the Air Force interested in promoting an extraterrestrial explanation for flying saucers but they were, prior to this time, under control. One example of this was the "Estimate of the Situation," a Top Secret document which was said to have strongly supported saucers from space but was ultimately rejected as an Air Force policy statement (Just Cause, September 1992).

Captain Edward Ruppelt, who became head of Project Blue Book in 1951, was the most liberal of the Air Force's UFO investigators to that time. He had promoted an upscale program, was open-minded in his approach, and while not an alien advocate, had regarded some of the sightings as genuine mysteries.

Question: If Air Force policy had been to discourage a flying saucer/outer space connection publicly, why suddenly open the door to a situation similar to that of the summer of 1947 when the press went absolutely wild with saucer stories and questions on what the government was doing about it? In other words, there wasn't a compelling reason for a policy shift in April 1952. The consensus of various UFO histories is that Ruppelt's serious approach to UFOs caused the Air Force's top brass to lend more support to Blue Book by being less secretive and more open and analytical. Ruppelt said in his book (The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects, 1956) that Life's pro-saucer statements were "unofficially inspired" by several very high-ranking Air Force officers at the Pentagon, "so high that their personal opinion was almost policy." Was the reason for these "personal opinions" being made a public issue based on the possibility that an "answer" to the saucer mystery was evident to the Air Force, something which hadn't been proven to that point, or could there have been a more mundane reason which will lead to the core of a new explanation as to why the 1952 wave evolved as it did?

JULY

July reports totalled 401, a massive increase in the monthly intake by Blue Book. Only 81 of those came from July 1-14, leaving 320 from July 15-31. This huge output from the 15th on is important as we shall see later.

In the process of doing historical sweeps of the press, CAUS has located a great deal of information on the 1952 wave. A comprehensive search of New England area newspapers has produced one thousand pages of clippings from July-August alone. Our search has taken five months of weekly six-hour sessions looking at microfilm in various libraries. One cannot get a grasp of the time without following news events day by day. Putting the saucer stories in context this way might reveal facts that were previously overlooked. "New" old sightings were found, Commentaries and opinions expressing the mindset of the population at the time were illuminating, And something else was found that was not anticipated.

During July, just prior to the saucer wave becoming prominent, the national media showed a great deal of concern as to the country's preparedness for national defense. Numerous stories were noted in virtually every newspaper searched regarding the lack of air spotters for the Air Force. "Air Spotters Rally to Fill Gaps," said the Berkshire Eagle (Ma.) for July 15th. "Not Enough Skywatchers," said the Lowell Sun (Ma.) for July 14th. "'Operation Skywatch' Flops: Volunteers Few," said the Holyoke Telegram-Transcript (Ma.). And on and on this theme went in the New England press between July 14th and the 16th. The problem appeared to be so universal that it would be fair to project this nationally. CAUS has compiled forty pages of clips so far and we expect to see much the same elsewhere.

What was this all about in the days before the great saucer wave? A fair amount of explanation is necessary.

THE GROUND OBSERVER CORPS

In the early 1950s the U.S. government had several basic units comprising its air defense system.

Early Warning Radar Stations - The purpose being of course to detect enemy aircraft electronically at a distance.

Ground Controlled Intercept - Consisted of radar stations designed to follow enemy aircraft and direct U.S. fighter planes towards them for attack.

Fighter Interceptor Aircraft Bases - Launched U.S. fighters on missions.

Another important element was the Ground Observer Corps, which was in essence groups of thousands of average citizens in volunteer service to the government for the purpose of visually spotting potential enemy aircraft overflying the United States. The GOC had begun as an experiment in September 1949, called "Operation Lookout." The results had been encouraging to the point that the Air Force felt a Ground Observer Corps could play an important role in plugging holes in the existing radar network. The ultimate goal of the program was to have 24-hour sky coverage by one million volunteer spotters at 24,000 observation posts (The Air Force by A. Brophy, 1956, pg. 91). And with volunteers, the cost of the program would be much less than paying professionals who could not be employed in such large numbers.

The GOC worked under joint control of the U.S. government and civil authorities. The Air Force would handle the tactical end of the program, such as training the volunteers and designing procedures for reporting. Civil authorities would take care of personnel and record keeping. The chain of command in a given state would begin with the governor. Under him would be a state civil defense director, then a director for the state Ground Observer Corps. The GOC director then had a GOC coordination officer who knew the appropriate locations and personnel in various counties. Within the counties would be area supervisors who would be responsible for the activation and operation of GOC posts in his/her area. Finally, there would be a post supervisor who would oversee the individual post and volunteer personnel assigned to it. The GOC post was generally a tower of sufficient height to give an all-sky view. A small shelter on top contained communications equipment, spotting equipment (binoculars; etc.) and other aids to relay the results of visual interception of unknown aircraft (Air Force Manual 50-12).

Part of the GOC as well was the Filter Center, a facility run by both military and civil authorities. This is to where the individual ground spotter would report his/her observation of an unknown. Staffed mainly by civilians, the Filter Center would receive phone calls, record information, plot it on large table maps, and perform other related tasks. Since it was also part of the military chain of command, the Filter Center had an Air Force Officer-in-Charge who made sure things went smoothly.

Until 1952, the GOC posts operated on a man-available basis. Rarely were posts fully staffed to provide complete 24-hour coverage of the sky. Generally the volunteers worked 2-3 hour shifts. The overnite, or graveyard, shifts were the most difficult to staff as they required being awake during most people's sleep time.

It is important to know all of this because few people now know what the Ground Observer Corps was and how it operated. Nor do they know how a GOC air alert called "Operation Skywatch" raised the curtain on the great saucer wave.

Operation Sktwatch was an attempt by the Air Force to put the GOC on a 24-hour schedule for the first time. The alert was earmarked for July 14, 1952. One problem with GOC operations at this point was the lack of enough volunteers to complete the staffing at various posts across the nation. The Air Force was trying to push the program along and wanted to prove to leaders in Washington that the GOC was prepared to meet the challenge of completing 24-hour sky coverage to supplement the existing radar network. It was a difficult task. One town Civil Defense director in Rhode Island, Judge James Watts, called the attempt at 24-hour coverage "asinine" (New Bedford Standard-Times [Ma.], July 15). He maintained that "people have to work for a living and don't have time," especially since the U.S. was not in a state of war.

In fact the Air Force rallied the GOC directors to get local newspapers involved in getting the public to volunteer. President Truman made a personal call for volunteers in a statement released in Washington on July 12 (Springfield Union [Ma.], July 13). As mentioned earlier in this report, it was very obvious that the GOC people were having difficulty everywhere.

Operation Skywatch was carried through but the results of the July 14th alert were "spotty" (Providence Journal [R.I.], July 18), "a deplorable situation and a sad lack of interest.." (Taunton Gazette [Ma.], July 16), "a flop in New England, (Holyoke Telegram-Transcript [Ma.], July 15), "Observation Post Apathy," (Portland Press-Herald [Me.], July 18). The Worcester Telegram (Ma.) of July 18 called the public "apathetic and fatalistic" about the danger of enemy attack.

The Air Force said that only about thirty percent of the posts in New England operated (Lowell Sun [Ma.], July 16). The Eastern Air Defense Force at Stewart Air Force Base, New York reported that only slightly more than 1500 posts in the New York area were manned out of 4000 (New York Herald-Tribune, July 15). This after a major effort was launched by the Air Force to make to GOC work.

A dilemma was now apparent. Question: How does the Air Force motivate the population to become involved with the GOC; to, in effect, stand and stare at the sky without pay for hours in anticipation of an enemy attack that may or may not ever occur? "Things aren't very good," said Major Richard Curtis, the commander of the New Haven, Connecticut Filter Center (New York Herald-Tribune, July 15). The Air Force was committed to the GOC program, having decided in May not to reconsider its decision to proceed with Operation Skywatch. The request to reconsider came from a San Francisco meeting of the National Association of State Civil Defense Directors, an influential group which could not sway the the Air Force. The final decision had been made by General Hoyt Vandenberg, Air Force Chief of Staff (New York Times, May 3, 1952).

THE WAVE

On July 16th, barely a day after Operation Skywatch began, the great summer 1952 wave was off and running. An escalation in the number of saucer sightings reported to the Air Force had been in progress since April but the press had paid little attention to them until this time.

Two veteran airline pilots, W.B. Nash and W.H. Fortenberry, had reported seeing eight huge discs zipping along in formation near Norfolk,

Virginia on July 14th while piloting their Pan American DC-4. At first six discs maneuvered in echelon formation below the airliner. Making a sharp turn, the six were then joined by two other discs, all of which soon zoomed upward and disappeared. Wire services transmitted the story nationwide with little comment by the Air Force. The accounts were loaded with superlatives about the credibility of the witnesses and the quality of the report.

A United Press story transmitted on the 17th, and quoting Captain Edward Ruppelt, indicated that sixty saucer reports had been received in two weeks and that 1952 sightings were double the rate for 1951. The Air Force, in effect, nudges the spiraling situation upward with this statement. Lt. Colonel Richard McGee, Director of Civil Defense for the Dayton, Ohio area (the home of Project Blue Book), said that he was alarmed by the increase and added, "There is something flying around in our skies and I wish I knew what it is " (Portland Press-Herald [Me.], July 18).

Sightings continued to increase. A July 19th story (Boston American) indicated that sightings were received from New York, Vermont, Colorado and Washington. The only mention of Air Force comment was that they "take seriously all such reports."

Some press sources were provided instructions on informing the public on how to spot and report the flying saucers (Brockton Enterprise [Ma.], July 19). One (Fall River Herald-News [Ma.], July 21) wondered why none of the sightings in those reported to that time were by members of the Ground Observer Corps.

A NEW SPIN ON AN OLD STORY

For any of this to mean something, we must explain where all of what we've said so far comes together. The Air Force enacted a program of 24-hour sky coverage. Its major problem was getting volunteers to man the country's observation posts. A very short time after the Air Force's program gets off to a poor start, flying saucers begin to creep into the press with little resistance from authorities. Think about it. If you were an Air Force Intelligence officer and a major, funded program of skywatching was heading for the hopper, what would you do? How would you motivate the public to go outside for two to three hour shifts and watch the skies? Answer: Flying Saucers! The lure and fascination of potential visitors from space would motivate most rational, thinking people into wanting to skywatch from an equipped observation post with the appropriate training. A chance at seeing one of these things, not to mention fulfilling a patriotic duty as well, would be irresistible to many citizens during the early 1950s.

This is not an idea with easy evidence. To direct this situation, the government would not have to do much of anything. If flying saucers come along at a convenient time, let the stories get out - to a point. Do not react to them. Allow the press to sensationalize, arouse the public interest, thus getting recruitments and volunteers up. Once the situation appeared to be going out of control, the Air Force could step in, hold a press conference with the full weight of authority behind it, and kill the wave with convincing-sounding explanations. Planting mildly misleading stories cannot be ruled out either as a way of keeping the wave, and the interest in it, rolling along.

The press could be fed instructions (i.e. training) to be printed for the public, seemingly for flying saucer spotting, but, on a more practical level for the Air Force in the long-term, GOC spotting. The whole business could be called a form of passive manipulation that would be hard to trace to its source, but would be highly effective for the

Air Force in its consequences. The GOC would be better staffed, the saucer wave will have served a positive purpose for the Air Force, and when the wave had outlived its usefulness, debunk it.

Is it plausible?

BACK TO THE WAVE

Press coverage of the 1952 wave exploded on July 22 with the information that saucers were seen visually and on radar over Washington, D.C. The attention given to this by the press was unlike anything seen since saucers began to be sighted in 1947. Hardly a newspaper in the country did not say anything about it. Continued bafflement characterized Air Force statements in the first week of the wave. "A thorough investigation is being made by the Air Technical Intelligence Center," the Air Force told the Associated Press (Boston Globe, July 23).

On the 23rd, the first GOC reports came through. Charles Buck, a Westfield, Maine GOC spotter, saw three silver discs at high altitude. This was followed by another GOC observer's report from Nahant, Mass. of two discs (Brockton Enterprise [Ma.], July 23). Rather than keeping the GOC reports "within the company" and away from the press, as one might have expected the Air Force to do normally, they were freely getting out to the media now. No serious objection was yet apparent from the Air Force, thus more encouragement for volunteers to enroll with the GOC and potentially to report flying saucers and make headlines. More reports followed from Cleveland GOC spotters. And more yet from Chicago. The commander of the GOC Filter Center in Chicago, Captain Everett Turner, said he received a flying saucer report every hour from his volunteer spotters (Springfield News [Ma.], July 25).

On the 24th, the Air Force, specifically Captain Edward Ruppelt of Project Blue Book, emphatically denied that the saucer wave had anything to do with putting the GOC volunteers on 24-hour duty (Providence Journal [R.I.], July 24). Yet in an interview with Colonel Richard McGee, the Dayton, Ohio Civil Defense Director in charge of the area incorporating Ruppelt's headquarters, he was asked whether or not there was a connection between Operation Skywatch and the flying saucers. He responded that to his knowledge no specific reason had been given "but that could be the answer." (emphasis added) (Portland Press-Herald [Me.], July 18). Evidently some military people were thinking about linkage between the two, as we are now. Without a smoking gun though, it could only have been unuttered speculation for most leaning to this idea.

The build-up of reports and publicity continued on for the next few days. The reluctance of the Air Force to debunk reports continued as well, though civilian scientists began to object to the presentation of the sightings as mysterious. Dr. Donald Menzel became prominent during this time as a key saucer critic.

The wave roared on at a fever pitch as press coverage on the 28th revealed a second weekend of strange sightings over Washington. Jet interceptors again were foiled in attempting to identify the intruders. The wave coverage was now taking on an alarmist tendency and serious questions were being asked as to whether or not the military could handle the situation effectively. For example, according to the New York Times (July 29), jets did not respond to the sightings over Washington until nearly two hours after the first radar trackings were reported, a remarkable admission by the military in the midst of the Cold War.

Now something had to be done to douse the fire that the Air Force had allowed to build. A press conference was quickly convened on the 29th of July, led by Major General John Samford, the Air Force's Chief of Intelligence.

The saucers, General Samford assured the press, were no threat to our national security. While conceding that some sightings were difficult to explain, the Air Force nevertheless balanced this with a variety of possible explanations for most of the reports. The "temperature inversion," a weather condition known to dupe radar into registering "solid" targets that were not really there in a physical sense, became the explanation of preference for the Washington radar trackings. Mirages and exaggerations were meted out to the press as further likelihoods. The Air Force was careful to protect the reputations of its personnel by asserting that credible observers were seeing relatively incredible things. The message was clear though that those "incredible things" were incredible as a function of subjective impressions, weather conditions and the fallibility of technical equipment.

With the weight of authority behind it, the press conference effectively nullified the alarm raised by the media. Since the saucers had not landed on the White House lawn, nor did decidedly mysterious hard evidence surface, it would have been difficult for pro-saucer advocates to offset the official pronouncements. Some of the press quickly seized on this shift in attitude with headlines like "Public Starting to Accept Theory Discs are Illusions" (Quincy Patriot-Ledger [Ma.], July 31).

The Blue Book report total for August was 278, a significant drop from July. Many did not accept the Air Force's explanations but the aftermath of the press conference distinctly reduced 1) the alarmist nature of the coverage which had begun well into the wave, and 2) the level of coverage which had sloped downward from the beginning of August onward.

GOC VOLUNTEERS/AIR FORCE RECRUITMENTS

Reports towards the end of July appeared indicating that not only had GOC volunteers increased but that the Air Force enlistments were up. The Springfield Union (Ma.), July 30 said, "Air Force Tops its July Quota," with the enlistment allotment "far over" its goal. In the month after the wave, GOC volunteers in Massachusetts increased from 3500 on July 14th (the first day of Operation Skywatch) to 7600 (Springfield Union [Ma.], August 25]. Several hundred new recruits signed up in Rhode Island (Providence Journal [R.I.], August 17). By no means was the GOC up to its goals but a valiant upward trend had begun.

Another remarkable admission was made by the Air Force's Vice Commander of the Eastern Air Defense Force, Brigadier General George Smith, that low-flying aircraft could easily avoid radar detection around the United States "and must be observed and plotted by ground observers" (New York Herald-Tribune, August 1). One would not expect publicly-admitted clues by the Air Force, then actively at odds with a powerful Soviet Union, on how to defeat our national defenses, unless of course the Air Force regarded a depleted GOC as a more serious national security issue. Equally remarkable was an admission two days before as to the inability of Air Force radar at Andrews Air Force Base in Washington to detect the unknowns reported on radar by the civilian scopes at Washington National Airport (Attleboro Sun [Ma.], July 29). Of what possible good would these admissions be unless they were for a higher purpose - to encourage support for a stronger Ground Observer Corps.

DISCUSSION

It is folly to be absolute about anything relating to UFOs.

Examples abound to support this. We can only follow a trail of information left in the wake of the 1952 saucer wave to see if there was a reason for why it happened the way it did. We are suggesting that the problems with the Ground Observer Corps program were serious enough that using publicity about flying saucers as a tool to enhance the program seemed not to be such an outrageous idea as it sounds. The wave has been a strange loose end demanding clarification. There is as yet no smoking gun but many hints are on the record.

It would be difficult to say whether the government had planted altogether false stories with the press to encourage the interest to continue in flying saucers, therefore in skywatching, therefore in volunteering with the Air Force. We can't point any fingers but we can't rule it out either. The true anomalies, besides the saucer reports themselves, lie in the lack of timely Air Force response to the wave that was consistent with previous policy; the seemingly scandalous admissions by the military of gaping holes in the technical aspects of U.S. national security, admissions for which the ultimate resolution appeared to be boosting the Air Force's pet program by whatever means available; and the amount of immediate, behind-the-scenes information coming from the government during the wave, the result being an enthralled public excited about what was going on in our skies.

Do not underestimate the effect if the 1952 wave on popular culture either. While it can be shown to have had a long-term influence on the military (the wave led directly to the Robertson Panel of the CIA, setting the future debunking policy on flying saucers by the Air Force), the influence on the population may have been more profound.

For example, one report (Boston Globe, September 7, 1952) indicated that toy manufacturers preparing for the 1952 Christmas season had taken note of an "unprecedented and furious upsurge of demand for rocket ships, space helmets, flying saucers and other playthings of an interplanetary nature." The children of America it seemed were weary of cowboy and western paraphernalia, which had dominated toy manufacturing for many years, and had switched their attention to extraterrestrial travel and visitations. The reason for this? According to the Boston Globe account, "The pre-occupation with space toys is of fairly recent origin. It started with the mid-summer revival of news stories about flying saucers. Now it has taken on such terrific proportions that it threatens to upset the industry's carefully laid plans for the Christmas shopping rush."

Some television shows had dealt with space themes to this time, the most notable being "Captain Video," debuting in 1949. But a rippling effect on the popular culture wasn't there until the summer of 1952. Premiering in 1953 were three new space shows: "Atom Squad," "Rocky Jones, Space Ranger," and "Rod Brown of the Rocket Rangers" (Fantastic Television by Gary Gerami and Paul Schulman, Harmony Books, N.Y., 1977). The aim of this is not difficult to fathom; to satisfy the new craze over space initiated by the great wave. Three more pioneering space TV shows, "Commando Cody," "Captain Z-RO," and "Captain Midnight" premiered in 1955. The cinema contributed films like "Invaders from Mars" in 1953, loaded with flying saucer imagery and with allusions to actual saucer reports that had appeared in the press. "Earth vs the Flying Saucers" was another release in 1955. It can be easily argued that these developments had an impact on young minds to the extent of enticing them in later years to becoming involved in the blossoming space program in the United States.

Optimism for space travel certainly wasn't fostered by the scientific community or the clergy during the time of the sightings. "Trip from Mars Would Take Three Years" (Quincy Patriot-Ledger [Ma.], August 5). "Only Vegetables Can Live on Mars" (Boston Globe, August 1). "Trips to the Planets Doomed" (Boston Post, September 6). "Pope Doubts Man's Ability to

Resolve All Mysteries" (Hartford Courant [Ct.], September 8). "Space Flights Put Many Years Away" (New York Times, September 5). If the authorities in science and religion were actively discouraging thoughts that space travel was imminent or that visitations by aliens was ongoing, what else could have fueled the mania for space at this time? Not much except the flying saucer wave. Whatever one thinks of the phenomena, it is inarguable that it has had a major impact on the culture, in books, in the press and just about every other medium of mass communication. Even today, during ratings sweeps by television and radio, two prime topics are used to garner ratings points: sex and UFOs. Observe broadcasting during the months of November, February and May and one will see an increase in UFO programs on talk shows. Perhaps we could call this the modern version of passive manipulation - this time by corporations seeking larger profits than by the government. (see TV Guide, January 31, 1981, "Teen Sex! UFOs! Male Models! Details at 11!").

A theory of passive manipulation would by its nature tend to be subtle in its origin and execution, allowing the perpetrator to do nothing but sit back and permit situations to evolve that would have reasonably predictable outcomes. With regard to the flying saucers of 1952, it was not hard to predict how the press and the public would react. Much like more recent years, it was a reaction of intense interest and substantial publicity that for a time progressed in a useful direction for the government. When it passed the point of being acceptable to accomplishing the goals in mind, i.e. relieving the GOC volunteer problem, a quick press conference deflated the ballooning wave.

Whether by serendipity or design, the saucer reports were there when needed by the military. Once used in this manner, and recognizing that such manipulation of the phenomena could create bigger problems than it was worth later, flying saucers were reburied by the Air Force as far as the public was concerned. The debunking policy took over again in 1953 and stood until the end of the Air Force's official investigations in 1969.

Many will recall the recent blockbuster film by Oliver Stone, "JFK." During one scene the film's star, playing Attorney Jim Garrison, meets with a shadowy figure calling himself "X." A former military officer, "X" described a series of strange coincidences which led him to believe that President John Kennedy had been killed by an internal government conspiracy. One of the coincidences was that the intelligence service of the Army was told to "stand down" during the president's visit to Dallas, Texas in 1963. "Stand down," meaning not to react, not to place operatives in the normal security locations to protect the president, not to be alert to potential problems, to go on as if nothing were happening. The result of course was that the president was placed in harm's way, a form of passive manipulation that, if true, helped to change history in a dramatic way.

We aren't going to revive the controversy over the JFK assassination here. It is simply to emphasize that there are probably many more examples of such passive manipulation on record, that the new spin on an old story isn't such a new spin after all. The answer to the intense publicity surrounding the 1952 saucer wave may have been there all the time, it just took us forty-one years to wake up.

EDITORIAL

We are planning a follow-up on the Pentacle document in our next issue. A new cache of government information has surfaced also which we will be discussing. Within the next year we may have to drastically alter our operation.

New Bedford Ma
Standard Times
July 22, 1952

Radar Picks Up Aerial 'Objects'

Air Force Probing Number of Reports

WASHINGTON, July 22 (UP)—The Air Force contributed to the rash of "flying saucer" speculation today by disclosing that strange aerial "objects" had been picked up on radar near the capital area.

The Air Force said radar operators at National Airport reported tracing eight unidentified "objects" on their screens about midnight last Saturday.

The Air Force, which officially has maintained a skeptical attitude toward "flying saucers," refused to make any attempt to identify the strange objects. A spokesman said he had no comment when asked whether the objects were "flying saucers."

Investigating 'Objects'

The Air Force said only that the objects had been picked up on the radar screen, moving at speeds ranging from 100 to 130 miles an hour. It said it is "investigating."

Two pilots—one civilian and one military—added to the mystery of the strange flights by reporting separately that they had seen strange objects resembling "shooting stars without tails" streaking across the sky in the Washington area during the last 10 days.

Captain S. C. Pierman of Capital Airlines said he had seen six "brilliant" lights zipping high across the heavens shortly after midnight last Saturday while on a flight between Washington and Martinsburg, W. Va.

Three of the objects, Pierman said, were flying in an approximate 25-degree dive at a "substantial speed," while the other three were flying on a horizontal plane "very, very high." He said he was unable to estimate exactly their altitude, but he had a "feeling" they were at about 60,000 feet.

Pierman, a veteran pilot who has been flying for Capital for 17 years, mostly in the same area, said he had "never seen anything like it before."

Not Stars

The lights, he said, appeared "very similar to brilliant shooting stars without tails." He emphasized, however, that he was certain the objects were not stars.

A Marine lieutenant gave the same description of lights he spotted while on night maneuvers over Quantico, Va., July 10.

SAMPLE 1952 PRESS COVERAGE

The Marine pilot, who asked that he be unidentified, said he spotted "two green objects—like shooting stars without tails—shooting straight across the sky at terrific speed." The objects, he said, were flying close together, one slightly behind and off to the side, at a "very, very high altitude."

Neither of these accounts conformed precisely with the traditional description of "flying saucers"—spherical objects which hover in space and then zip away at speeds in excess of 1,000 miles an hour.

Move at High Speeds

Two Pan-American Airline pilots reported recently, however, that they had seen eight "glowing, red-orange" discs flying in formation 150 miles south of here July 13. The "objects" were closer to the traditional "flying saucers," according to the pilots' description, twisting through unheard-of maneuvers and rushing along at speeds "far above 1,000 miles an hour."

The report by the Pan-American pilots is being investigated by the Air Force.

A special Air Force investigating body concluded last year after looking into nearly 400 separate "sightings," that there are no such things as "flying saucers." It said the "visions" were due either to mass hysteria, hoaxes or mistaken identification of such things as balloons or meteors.

Lowell (Ma) Sun

July 14, 1952

Not Enough Skywatchers

Only 3500 Available for
12,000 Posts in N. E.

BOSTON, July 14 (UP)—The air defense command's "operation skywatch" began today with New England seriously undermanned and a number of aircraft spotting stations closed.

"I don't expect all posts or even a large number will be operated," said Massachusetts Adjutant General William H. Harrison in reporting that attempts to sign up volunteer spotters was "not very encouraging."

He estimated that 3,500 spotters would be available to stand two-to-six-hour tricks at the state's 140 stations while 12,000 were needed.

Few 'Skywatch' Posts Filled as Operation Opens

New Hampshire had the worst record in the Northeast yesterday morning as the country's air defense "Operation Skywatch" went into effect on a 24-hour basis.

At noontime only 20 of the Granite State's 105 observation posts had reported in. Fortunately 16 of the state Forestry Department's forest rangers took over skywatch of their areas.

Eight other Forestry Department firetowers in the state could not make telephone or radio contact with the local Filter Center which is the reporting point for the 312 observation posts in Maine, Vermont, Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

MANCHESTER (N. H.) UNION LEADER
— State Edition — Tuesday, July 15, 1952

Southbridge (Ma) News

SATURDAY, JULY 26, 1952

Our Fate and "Skywatch"

A man on a solitary hill seems a puny defense in a supersonic war, but he isn't. It is human eye and ear which stand guard where electronics fail, the human brain that improvises when machines break down.

It is the judgment of these responsible for the defense of the nation that our perimeter of defense be manned by aircraft spotters, radar net or not, on a 24-hour basis. Yet Operation Skywatch is hundreds of thousands of volunteers short of the minimum needed for security. It is easy to see why.

Being a sentinel is dull, monotonous work. The Roman guard who stood watching for barbarian spearmen in the Gallic dawn was a problem for his officers. It was hard to keep him alert. And potential jet planes are just as dull to watch for as potential spearmen.

This modern cordon of defense will be maintained by people who make unglamorous sacrifice, not just in hours of emergency, but during the long years of crisis we see ahead. Those people cannot be scared into serving, they must be sold on the importance of the task they are asked to do.

They can only be sold by inspiration and by facts. Both have been missing from Skywatch... We, the people, must be convinced. When convinced we will serve. Until we do we should not sleep.

—Boston Herald