

# *The CIA, the Movie Mogul, and 'The Day the Earth Stood Still'*

*Evidence Mounts that Iconic 1951 movie was CIA UFO Acclimation Project*

---

By Robbie Graham

---

- **Darryl Zanuck** – the movie mogul who oversaw the film’s production – was a CIA asset.
- **Zanuck** was considered a “friend” of the US government who could be “relied upon” to subtly “insert ideas” into his productions.
- **Zanuck** helped shape the script for *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and wanted audiences to “completely accept” that open ET contact could happen “in the not too distant future.”

In 1983, while conducting research for a UFO documentary, Emmy award-winning filmmaker and journalist Linda Moulton Howe was told by Air Force Intelligence officers that the 1951 movie *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, which depicted an alien landing in Washington D.C., was “inspired by the CIA,” and “one of the first government tests of public reaction to such an event.”<sup>1</sup>



If *The Day the Earth Stood Still* truly was a CIA test of public reaction to open extraterrestrial contact – possibly containing classified information about UFOs – then the Agency would have needed at least one trustworthy asset working on the production in a position of creative influence. With this in mind, it is notable that the screenwriter of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* – Edmund H. North – was a Major in the Army Signal Corps prior to being selected by 20th Century Fox to pen the script.<sup>ii</sup> During his time in the Corps, North had been in charge of training and educational documentaries, and later established himself as a Hollywood scribe of patriotic war films including *Sink the Bismark!* (1960) and *Submarine X-1* (1968), as well as *Patton* (1970), for which he received an Oscar – all of which raises the possibility that he maintained an official or quasi-official role in the government’s cinematic propaganda campaigns throughout his career.

More notably, the man responsible for overseeing the production of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* – 20th Century Fox production chief Darryl Zanuck – was himself in charge of an Army Signal Corps documentary unit during the Second World War<sup>iii</sup> and was at the time of the movie’s production a board member of the National Committee for Free Europe (NCFE), which was established by the CIA in 1949 ostensibly as a private anti-Soviet organisation. As a star member of the NCFE, Zanuck was directly associated with the organisation’s executive committee, which included future CIA Director Allen Dulles and future US President Dwight D. Eisenhower.<sup>iv</sup> In 1951 – when the *The Day the Earth Stood Still* was being written, produced and released – the President of the NCFE was General Charles Douglas (C.D.) Jackson, who served as Deputy Chief of the Psychological Warfare Division of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEP) during WWII, and would later be appointed as special advisor to President Eisenhower on Psychological Warfare. He was, in the words of historian Frances Stoner Saunders, “one of the most influential covert strategists in America.”<sup>v</sup> Jackson referred to Darryl Zanuck as being among a group of Hollywood “friends” – including Cecil B. DeMille, Jack Warner and Walt Disney – on whom the government could rely “to insert in their scripts and in their action the right ideas with the proper subtlety.”<sup>vi</sup>



“Friends.” Left: General Charles Douglas Jackson, the US government’s psychological warfare expert. Right: Darryl Zanuck, Twentieth Century Fox Production Chief.

With this in mind, and in light of what USAF intelligence officers asserted to Linda Moulton Howe about *The Day the Earth Stood Still* being a CIA test of public reaction to open ET contact, a memo from Darryl Zanuck to the movie's producer, Julian Blaustein (also a veteran of the Army Signal Corps) and screenwriter Edmund North makes for fascinating reading. In the memo, dated August 10, 1950, Zanuck stresses that that every effort should be made to “compel the audience to completely *accept* [emphasis in original] this story as something that could possibly happen in the not too distant future.”<sup>vii</sup> Zanuck placed particular emphasis on the now iconic scene in which the alien Klaatu lands his flying saucer in Washington, D.C. before emerging to address the public. Zanuck advised Blaustein and North to “treat it as realistically as you possibly can,”<sup>viii</sup> even suggesting that the scene play out documentary style: “You should suddenly hear radio programs being interrupted with startling flash announcements from Washington, New York, Los Angeles, etc. The whole nation is ‘listening in.’ This should be dramatized like the opening of a documentary film.”<sup>ix</sup> The audience must “‘accept’ our entire project,”<sup>x</sup> said Zanuck.

The script for *The Day the Earth Stood Still* was finally locked and approved by Darryl Zanuck on February 21, 1951. Virtually all of his script suggestions were followed. As a final thought on the movie in the context of propaganda and persuasion, the reader might find some significance in the following statement made by Zanuck in 1943 during his time in the Signal Corps: “If you have something worthwhile to say, dress it up in the glittering robes of entertainment and you will find a ready market... without entertainment, no propaganda film is worth a dime.”<sup>xi</sup>

---

<sup>i</sup> Linda Moulton Howe, telephone interview with the author, 8 Oct. 2008.

<sup>ii</sup> See: Peter B. Flint, “Edmund H. North, 79, a Writer; He Shared an Oscar for 'Patton'”, *The New York Times*, Obituaries, 31 Aug., 1990, accessed on 4 June, 2012 at: <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/08/31/obituaries/edmund-h-north-79-a-writer-he-shared-an-oscar-for-patton.html>

<sup>iii</sup> See: Leonard Mosley, *Zanuck* (Boston, MA, 1984), 195–244.

<sup>iv</sup> See: Tony Shaw, *Hollywood's Cold War* (Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 115. For the full list of the NCFE's original members and Executive Officers, see: Central Intelligence Agency, “National Committee for Free Europe,” memo dated 4 Aug., 1949, *Cia.gov*, accessed on 14. Jun., 2012 at: [http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC\\_0000238872/DOC\\_0000238872.pdf](http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000238872/DOC_0000238872.pdf)

<sup>v</sup> See: Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta, 2000), 146 – 147. See also: “Jackson, C. D.: Papers, 1931-1967,” *Eisenhower Archives* (online), accessed on 14 Jun., 2012 at: [http://eisenhower.archives.gov/Research/Finding\\_Aids/pdf/Jackson\\_CD\\_Papers.pdf](http://eisenhower.archives.gov/Research/Finding_Aids/pdf/Jackson_CD_Papers.pdf)

<sup>vi</sup> See: Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War*, 289 – 290.

<sup>vii</sup> See: Rudy Behlmer (ed.), *Memo from Darryl F. Zanuck: The Golden Years at Twentieth Century-Fox* (New York: Grove Press, 1993), 192.

<sup>viii</sup> *Ibid*, 191.

<sup>ix</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>x</sup> *Ibid*, 192.

<sup>xi</sup> Cited in Tony Shaw, *Hollywood's Cold War*, 9.