

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE CLASSICS

1948 was only one hour and twenty-five minutes old when a gentleman from Abilene, Texas, made the first UFO report of the year. What he saw, "a fan shaped glow" in the sky, was insignificant as far as UFO reports go but it ushered in a year that was to bring feverish activity to Project Sign.

With the Soviets practically eliminated as a UFO source, the idea of interplanetary space ships was becoming more popular. During 1948 the people in ATIC were openly discussing the possibility of interplanetary visitors without others tapping their heads and looking smug. During 1948 the novelty of UFO's had worn off for the press *and* every John or Jane Doe who saw one didn't make the front page as they had in 1947. Editors were becoming hardened, only a few of the best reports got any space. Only "The Classics" rated headlines. "The Classics" were three historic reports that were the highlights of 1948. They are called "The Classics", a name given them by the Project Blue Book staff, because (1) they are classic examples of how the true facts of a UFO report can be twisted and warped by some writers to prove their point, (2) they are the most highly publicized reports of this early era of the UFO's, and (3) they "proved" to ATIC's intelligence specialists that UFO's were real.

The apparent lack of interest in UFO reports by the press was not a true indication of the situation. I later found out, from talking to *[newspaper reporters and magazine]* writers, that all during

1948 the interest in UFO's was running high. The Air Force Press Desk in the Pentagon was continually being asked what progress was being made in the UFO investigation. The answer was, "Give us time. This job can't be done in a week." The press respected this and was giving them time. But every writer worth his salt has contacts, those "usually reliable sources" you read about, and those contacts were talking. All during 1948 contacts in the Pentagon were telling how UFO reports were rolling in at the rate of several per day and how ATIC UFO investigation teams were flying out of Dayton to investigate them. They were telling how another Air Force investigative organization had been called in to lighten ATIC's load and allow ATIC to concentrate on the analysis of the reports. The writers knew this was true because they had crossed paths with these men whom they had mistakenly identified as FBI agents. The FBI was never officially interested in UFO sightings. The writers' contacts in the airline industry told about the UFO talk from V.P.'s down to the ramp boys. Dozens of good, solid, reliable, old, airline pilots were seeing UFO's. All of this led to one conclusion; whatever the Air Force had to say, when it was ready to talk, would be "Newsworthy". But the Air Force wasn't ready to talk.

Project Sign personnel were just getting settled down to work after the New Year's holiday when the "ghost rockets" came back to the Baltic Countries of Europe. Air Attaches in Sweden, Denmark, and Norway fired wires to ATIC telling about the reports. Wires went back asking for more information.

The "ghost rockets", so tagged by the newspapers, had first been seen in the summer of 1946, a year before the first UFO sighting in the U.S. There were many different descriptions for the reported objects. They were usually seen in the hours of darkness and almost always traveling at extremely high speed. They were shaped like a ball or projectile, were a bright green, white, red, or yellow and sometimes had an associated sound. Like their American cousins, the flying saucers, they were always so far away that no details could be seen. For no good reason, other than speculation and circulation, the newspapers had soon begun to refer authoritatively to these "ghost rockets" as guided missiles, and inferring that they were from

Russia. Peenemunde, the great German missile development center and birth place of the V-1 and V-2 guided missile came in for its share of suspicion, since it was held by the Russians. By the end of the summer of 1946 the reports were widespread coming from Denmark, Norway, Spain, Greece, French Morocco, Portugal and Turkey. In 1947, they broke out again. But Project Sign personnel were too busy to worry about European UFO reports, they were busy at home. A National Guard pilot had just been killed chasing a UFO.

Psychologists use a test called Word Association. Chances are that if the test were given to people who were ten years old, or older, in 1948, the majority would associate the word "flying saucer" with "the pilot that was killed". On January 7, all of the late

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papers in the U.S. carried headlines similar to those in The Louisville Courier, "F-51 and Capt. Mantell Destroyed Chasing Flying Saucer". This was Volume I of "The Classics", The Mantell Incident.

At 1:15 on that afternoon the control tower operators at Godman, just outside Louisville, Kentucky, got a telephone call from the Kentucky State Highway Patrol. The patrol wanted to know if Godman Tower knew anything about any unusual aircraft in the vicinity. Several people from Maysville, Kentucky, a small town 80 miles east of Louisville, had reported seeing a strange aircraft. Godman knew that they had nothing in the vicinity so they called Flight Service at Wright-Patterson AFB. In a few minutes Flight Service called back. Their air traffic control board showed no flights in the area. About twenty minutes later the state police (*sp?*) called again. This time people from the towns of Owensboro and Irvington, Kentucky, west of Louisville, were reporting a strange craft. The report from these two towns was a little more complete. The townspeople had described the object to the state police as being, "circular, about 250 to 300 feet in diameter", and moving westward at a "pretty good clip". Godman Tower checked Flight Service again. Nothing. All this time the tower operators had been looking for the reported object. They theorized that since the UFO had had to pass north of Godman to get from Maysville to Owensboro, it might come back.

At 1:45 they saw it, or something like it. Later, in his official report, the assistant tower operator, said that he had seen the object for several minutes before he called his chief's attention to it. He said that he had been reluctant to "make a

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flying saucer report". As soon as the two men in the tower had assured themselves that the UFO they saw was not an airplane or a weather balloon, they called Flight Operations. They wanted the Operations Officer to see the UFO. Before long word of the sighting had gotten around to key personnel on the base and several officers, besides the Base Operations Officer and the Base Intelligence Officer, were in the tower. All of them looked at the UFO through the tower's 6 x 50 binoculars and decided they couldn't identify it. About this time Col. Hix, the Base Commander, arrived. He looked and he was baffled. At 2:30, they reported, they were discussing what should be done when four F-51's came into view, approaching the base from the south.

The tower called the flight leader, Capt. Mantell, and asked him to take a look at the object and try to identify it. One F-51 in the flight was running low on fuel so he asked permission to go on to his base. Mantell took his two remaining wing men, made a turn, and started after the UFO. The people in Godman Tower were directing him as none of the pilots could see the object at this time. They gave Mantell an initial heading toward the south and the flight was last seen heading in the general direction of the UFO.

By the time the F-51's had climbed to 10,000 feet, the two wing men later reported, Mantell had pulled out ahead of them and they could just barely see him. At 2:45 Mantell called the tower and said, "I see something above and ahead of me and I'm still climbing". All the people in the tower heard Mantell say this

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and they heard one of the wing man call back and ask, "What the hell are we looking for?" The tower immediately called and asked him for a description of what he saw. Odd as it may seem no one can

remember exactly what he answered. Saucer historians have credited him with saying, "I've sighted the thing. It looks metallic and it's tremendous in size.. --- Now it's starting to climb." Then in a few second he is supposed to have called and said, "It's above me and I'm gaining on it. I'm going to 20,000 feet" Everyone in the tower agreed on this one last bit of the transmission, -- "I'm going to 20,000 feet," but they didn't agree on the first part, about the UFO being metallic and tremendous.

The two wing men were now at 15,000 feet and trying frantically to call Mantell. He had climbed far above them by this time and was out of sight. Since none of them had any oxygen they were worried about Mantell. Their calls were not answered. Mantell never talked to anyone again. The two wing men leveled off at 15,000 feet, made another fruitless effort to call Mantell and started to come back down. As they passed Godman Tower on their way to their base one of them said something to the effect that all he had seen was a reflection on his canopy.

When they landed at their base, Staniford Field, just north of Godman , one pilot had his F-51 refueled and serviced with oxygen, and took off to search the area again. He didn't see anything.

At 3:50 the tower lost sight of the UFO. A few minutes later they got word that Mantell had crashed and was dead.

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Several hours later, at 7:20 PM, airfield towers all over the midwest sent in frantic reports of another UFO. *[By this time they all knew about the mysterious circumstances of Mantell's death. Columbus, Ohio, St. Louis, Kansas City, Evansville, Indianapolis, and other cities poured reports into the CAA communications net.]* In all about a dozen airfield towers reported the UFO *[. All of the towers reported it]* as being low on the southwestern horizon and disappearing after about twenty minutes. *[The dozen towers gave a dozen descriptions of what the object looked like and what it did.]* The writers of saucer lore say this UFO was what Mantell was chasing when he died; the Air Force says this UFO was Venus. *[The Air Force can prove their claim. It wasn't "a return of the craft that shot down Mantell".]*

The people on Project Sign worked fast on the Mantell Incident, *[in fact they heard about it through Flight Service while it was all in progress.]* Contemplating a flood of queries from the press, as soon as they heard about the crash, they realized that they had to get a quick answer. Venus had been the target of a chase by an Air Force F-51 several weeks before and there were similarities between this sighting and the Mantell incident. So almost before the rescue crews had reached the crash, the word Venus went out. This satisfied the editors and so it stood for about a year; Mantell had unfortunately been killed trying to reach the planet Venus.

To the press, the nonchalant, off-hand manner with which the sighting was written off by the Air Force Public Relations Officer, showed great confidence in the conclusion, Venus, but behind the barb wire fence that encircled ATIC the nonchalant attitude didn't

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exist among the intelligence analysts. One man had already left for Louisville and the rest were doing some tall speculating. The story about the tower-to-air talk, "It looks metallic and it's tremendous in size", spread fast. Rumor had it that the tower had carried on a running conversation with the pilots and that there was more information than was so far known. Rumor also had it that this conversation had been recorded. Unfortunately neither of these rumors were true.

Over a period of several weeks the file on the Mantell Incident grew in size until it was the most thoroughly investigated sighting of that time, at least the file was the thickest.

About a year later the Air Force released its official report on the incident. To use a trite term, it was a masterpiece in the art of "weasel wording". It said that the UFO might have been Venus or it could have been a balloon. Maybe two balloons. It probably was Venus except that this is doubtful because Venus was too dim to be seen in the afternoon. This jolted writers who had been following the UFO story. Only a few weeks before, the Saturday Evening Post had published a two part story entitled What You Can Believe About Flying Saucers. *[It appeared to have] The story had* official sanction and had quoted the Venus Theory as a positive solution. *[This discrepancy was carefully pointed out in several widely publicised magazine and newspaper articles.]* To clear up the situation, several of the writers were allowed to

interview a Major Boggs who was the Air Force's Pentagon expert on UFO's. Boggs was asked directly about the conclusion of the Mantell Incident[,] *and* he flatly stated that it was Venus. The writers

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pointed out the official Air Force analysis. Boggs answer, "They checked again and it was Venus." He didn't know who "they" were, where "they" had checked, or what "they" had checked, but it was Venus. The writers then asked, "If there was a later report "they" had made why wasn't it used as a conclusion?" "Was it available?" The answer to the last question was, "no", and the lid snapped back down. This interview added confusion to an already confused situation. It gave the definite impression that the Air Force was unsuccessfully trying to "cover up" some very important information, using Venus as a front. Nothing excites a newspaper or magazine writer any more than to think he has stumbled onto a big story and that some one is trying to cover it up. Many writers thought this after the interview with Major Boggs, and many still think it. You can't really blame them, either.

In early 1952 I got a telephone call on ATIC's direct line to the Pentagon. It was a colonel in the Director of Intelligence's office. The office of Public Information had been getting a lot of queries about all of the confusion over the Mantel Incident. What was the answer?

I dug out the file. In 1949 all of the original material on the incident had been micro-filmed but something had been spilled on the film. Many sections were so badly faded they were illegible. As I had to do with many of the older sightings that were now history, I collected what I could from the file, filling in the blanks by talking to people who had been at ATIC during the early UFO era.

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There were a lot of those people still around, "Red" Honacker, George Towles, Al Deyarmond, Nick Post, and many others. Most of them were civilians, the military had been transferred out by this time.

Some of the press clippings in the file mentioned Major Boggs and his concrete proof of Venus. I couldn't find this concrete proof in the file so I asked around about Major Boggs. Major Boggs, I found, was an officer in the Pentagon who had at one time written a short intelligence summary about UFO's. He had never been stationed at ATIC, nor was he especially well versed on the UFO problem. When the word of the press conference regarding the Mantell Incident came down, a UFO expert was needed. Boggs, because of his short intelligence summary on UFO's, became the expert. He had evidently conjured up "they" and "their later report" to support his Venus answer because the writers at the press conference had him in a corner. I looked farther.

Fortunately the man who had done the most extensive work on the incident, a Dr. J. Allen Hynek, Head of the Ohio State University Astronomy Department, could be contacted. I called Dr. Hynek, and arranged to meet him the next day.

Looking back on it now Dr. Hynek was one of the most impressive scientists I met while working on the UFO project, and I met a good many. He didn't do two things that some of them did; give you the answer before he knew the question, or immediately begin to expound on his accomplishments in the field of science. I arrived at Ohio State just before lunch so Dr. Hynek invited me to eat with him at

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OSU Faculty Club. He wanted to refer to some notes he had on the Mantell Incident and they were in his office so we discussod UFO's in general during lunch.

*[His first comment was that he was very glad to hear that the Air Force had decided to further pursue the UFO investigation. He said that although he most certainly was not a "flying saucer" addict, he thought that the UFO's had been written off, too hastily. I was quite amazed at his remembering the details of many of the sightings that had occurred during the 1947-49 period. He asked about any new information we might have on "nocturnal meandering lights", which I found out were his pet type of UFO. As he explained it, they were lights that meandered around the sky like a lighted weather balloon when no weather balloon was in the area. All I could tell that they were still with us.]*

*[I learned as much about the 1947-1949 period of the history during the brief hour we spent at lunch as he did about the 1949-1952 period. I hinted that I would certainly like to see him working for ATIC again, but he didn't take the hint so I dropped it.]*

Back in his office he started to review the Mantell Incident. He had been responsible for the "weasel-worded" report that the Air Force released in late 1949, and he apologized for it. Had he known that it was going to cause so much confusion, he said, he would have been more specific. He thought the incident was a dead issue. The reason that Venus had been such a strong suspect was that it was in almost the same spot in the sky as the UFO. *[The people in the Godman Tower had been able to give a fairly good estimate of the direction and height above the horizon.]*

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*[Dr. Hynek said that he had computed the position of Venus and the two came out close. He]* Dr. Hynek referred to his notes[,] *and told me that* at 3:00 PM Venus had been south southwest of Godman and 33 degrees above the southern horizon. At 3:00 PM the people in the tower estimated the UFO to be southwest of Godman and at an elevation of about 45 degrees. Allowing for human error in estimating directions and angles, this was close, I agreed. There was one big flaw in the theory, however. Venus wasn't bright enough to be seen. He had computed the brilliance of the planet and on the day in question it was only six times as bright as the surrounding sky. Then he explained what this meant. Six times may sound like a lot, but it isn't. When you start looking for a pinpoint of light only six times as bright as the surrounding sky, it's almost impossible to find it, even on a clear day.

*[Dr. Hynek said that he didn't think that the UFO was Venus.]*

I later found out that although it was a relatively clear day there was considerable haze. *[Mantell's wing men had lost him in this haze shortly after they began to climb.]*

*[Dr. Hynek said that he was almost positive that the object, whatever it was, was not Venus, although by sheer coincidence Venus had been in the same location.]*

I asked him about some of the other possibilities. He repeated the balloon, canopy reflection, and sundog theories but he refused to comment on them since, as he said, he was an astrophysicist and would only care to comment on the astrophysical aspects of the sightings.

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I drove back to Dayton convinced that the UFO wasn't Venus. Dr. Hynek had said Venus would have been a pinpoint of light. The people in the tower had been positive of their descriptions; their statements brought that out. They couldn't agree on a description, they called the UFO, "a Parachute", "an ice cream cone tipped with red", "round and white", "huge and silver or metallic", "small white object", "one fourth the size of the full moon", but all the descriptions plainly indicated a large object. None of the descriptions could even vaguely be called a pinpoint of light.

This aspect of a definite shape seemed to eliminate the sundog theory, too. Sundogs, or Parhelia as they are technically known, are caused by ice particles reflecting a diffused light. This would not give a sharp outline. I also recalled two instances where Air Force pilots had chased sundogs. *[One of these occurred at \_\_\_a AFB in Lubbock, Texas, while I was there investigating the now famous "Lubbock Lights".]* In both instances when the aircraft began the sundog disappeared. This was because the angle of reflection changed as the airplane climbed several thousand feet. These sundog-caused UFO's also had fuzzy edges.

I had always heard a lot of wild speculation about the condition of the Mantell's crashed F-51, so I wired for a copy of accident report. It arrived several days after my visit with Dr. Hynek. *[From the reports of the eye witnesses at the crash scene it was obvious that] the report said that the* F-51 had lost a wing due to excessive speed in a dive. *After* Mantell *[had tried to climb to 20,000 feet but]* had "blacked out" due to the lack of oxygen. *[The aircraft was \_\_\_ced]*

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*[to climb so it went on up until the high altitude caused the power to drop, allowing the F-51 to gradually*

*level off. The propeller torque pulled it into a left turn and as it turned it started a shallow dive. The dive steepened until the speed became excessive and first the wing, then the tail, pulled off. To me, as an aeronautical engineer, this sounded \_\_\_\_\_ logical.]* Mantell's body was not burned, not disintegrated, and not full of holes; the wreck was not radioactive, nor was it magnetized.

One very important and pertinent question remained. Why did Mantell, an experienced pilot, try to go to 20,000 feet when he didn't even have an oxygen mask? If he had run out of oxygen it would have been different. Every pilot and crewman has it pounded into him, "Do not, under any circumstances, go above 15,000 feet without oxygen." During high altitude indoctrination, during World War II, I made several trips up to 30,000 feet in a pressure chamber. To demonstrate anoxia we would leave our oxygen masks off until we got dizzy. A few of the more hardy souls could get to 15,000 feet, but nobody ever got over 17,000. Possibly Mantell thought he could climb up to 20,000 in a hurry and get back down before he got anoxia and blacked out, but this would be a foolish chance. This point was covered in the report. A long time friend of Mantell's went on record to say that he'd flown with him several years and know him personally. He couldn't conceive of Mantell even thinking about disregarding his lack of oxygen. Mantell was one of the most cautious pilots he knew. The only thing I can think, he commented, was that he was after something that he believed to be more important than his life or his family.

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*[This may be the excuse.]*

My next step was to try to find out what Mantell's wing men had seen or thought, *but this was a blind alley*. All of this evidence was in the ruined portion of the Microfilm, even their names were missing. The only reference I could find to them was a vague passage indicating that they hadn't seen anything.

I concentrated on the canopy reflection theory. It is widely believed that many flying saucers are caused by pilots chasing a reflection on their canopy. I checked over all the reports we had on file. I couldn't find one that had been written off for this reason. I dug back into my own flying experience and talked to a dozen pilots. All of us had momentarily been startled by a reflection on the aircraft's canopy or wing, but in a second or two it had been obvious that it was a reflection. Mantell chased the object for at least 15 to 20 minutes and it is inconceivable that he wouldn't realize in that length of time that he was chasing a reflection.

*[It was now apparent that no one would ever know for sure what Mantell was looking at when he made that last radio call, so I switched my line of investigation to what the people in the tower saw. I thought that it was safe to assume that Mantell was chasing the same UFO since he was headed directly toward it when he was last seen.]*

About the only theory left to check was that the object might have been one of the big, 100 foot diameter, "skyhook" balloons. I rechecked the descriptions of the UFO made by the people in the tower. The first man to sight the object called it a parachute;

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others said ice cream cone, round, etc. All of these descriptions fit a balloon. Buried deep in the file were two more references to balloons that I had previously missed. Not long after the object had disappeared from view at Godman AFB, a man from Madisonville, Kentucky, called Flight Service in Dayton. He had seen an object traveling southeast. He had looked at it through a telescope and it was a balloon. At 4:45 an astronomer living north of Nashville, Tennessee, called in. He had also seen a UFO, looked at it through a telescope, and it was a balloon.

In the thousands of words of testimony and evidence taken on the Mantell Incident this was the only reference to balloons. I had purposely not paid too much attention to this possibility because I was sure that it had been thoroughly checked back in 1948. Now I wasn't sure.

I talked with one of the people who had been in on the Mantell investigation. The possibility of a balloon causing the sighting had been mentioned but hadn't been followed up for two reasons. Number one was that everybody at ATIC was convinced that the object Mantell was after was a space ship and that this was the only course they had pursued. When the sighting grew older and no space ship proof could be found everybody jumped on the Venus band wagon as this theory had "already been established". It was an

easy way out. The second reason was that a quick check had been made on weather balloons and none were in the area. The big skyhook balloon Project was highly classified at that time and since everybody was convinced that the object was of interplanetary origin (a minority wanted to give the Russians credit), they didn't want to bother to buck the red tape of security to get data on skyhook flights.

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The group that supervises the contracts for all the "skyhook" research flights for the Air Force is located at Wright Field, so I called them. They had no records on flights back in 1948 but they did think that the big balloons were being launched from Clinton County AFB in southern Ohio, at that time. They offered to get the records of the winds on January 7, and see what flight path a balloon launched in southwestern Ohio would have taken. In a few days they had the data for me.

Unfortunately the times of the first sightings, from the towns outside Louisville, were not exact but it was possible to partially reconstruct the sequence of events. The winds were such that a skyhook balloon, launched from Clinton County AFB, could be seen from the town east of Godman AFB, the town from where the first UFO was reported to the Kentucky State Police. It is not unusual to be able to see a large balloon for 50 to 60 miles. The balloon could have traveled west for awhile, climbing as it moved with the strong east winds that were blowing that day, and picking up speed as the winds got stronger at altitude. In twenty minutes it could have been in a position where it could be seen from Owensboro, and Irvington, Kentucky, the two towns west of Godman. The second reports to the state police had come from these two towns. Still climbing, the balloon would have reached a level where a strong wind was blowing in a southerly direction. The jet stream winds were not being plotted in 1948 but the weather chart shows strong indications of a southerly bend in the jet stream for this day. Jet stream or not, the balloon

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would have moved rapidly south, still climbing. At a point somewhere south or southwest of Godman it would have climbed through the southerly moving winds to a calm belt at about 60,000 feet. At this level it would slowly drift south or southeast. A skyhook balloon can be seen at 60,000.

When first seen by the people in Godman tower, the UFO was south of the airbase. It was relatively close and looked "like a parachute", which a balloon does. During the two hours that it was in sight the observers reported that it seemed to hover, yet each observer estimated the time he looked at the object through the binoculars and timewise the descriptions ran "huge", "small", "one-fourth the size of a full moon" and "one tenth the size of a full moon". Whatever the UFO was, it was slowly moving away. As the balloon continued to drift in a southerly direction it would have picked up stronger winds, and could have easily been seen by astronomers in Madisonville, Kentucky, and "north of Nashville" an hour after it disappeared from view at Godman.

Somewhere in the archives of the Air Force or the Navy there are records that will show whether or not a balloon was launched from Clinton County AFB, Ohio, on January 7, 1948. I could never find these records. People who were working with the early skyhook projects "remember" operating out of Clinton County AFB in 1947, but refuse to be pinned down to a January 7 flight. Maybe, they said.

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The Mantell incident is the same old UFO jigsaw puzzle. By assuming the shape of one piece, a balloon launched from southwestern Ohio, the whole picture neatly falls together. It shows a huge balloon that Capt. Thomas Mantell died trying to reach. He didn't know that he was chasing a balloon because he had never heard of a huge, 100 foot diameter skyhook balloon, let alone seen one. Leave out the one piece of the jigsaw puzzle and the picture is a UFO, "metallic and tremendous in size".

It could have been a balloon. This is the answer I phoned back to the Pentagon.

All during January and February of 1948 the reports of "ghost rockets" continued to come from Air Attaches in foreign countries bordering the Baltic Sea. People in North Jutland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Germany reported "balls of fire traveling slowly across the sky". The reports were very sketchy and incomplete, most of them being accounts from newspapers. In a few days the UFO's were being seen all

over Europe and South America. Foreign reports hit a peak in the latter part of February and the U.S. newspapers began to pick up the stories.

The Swedish Defense Staff supposedly conducted a comprehensive study of the incidents and concluded that they were all explainable in terms of astronomical phenomena. Since this was UFO history I made several attempts to get some detailed and official information on this report and the sightings, but I was never successful.

The ghost rockets left in March, as mysteriously as they had arrived.

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All during the spring of 1948 good reports continued to come in. Some were just run of the mill but a large percentage of them were good, coming from people whose reliability couldn't be questioned. For example three scientists reported that for thirty seconds they had watched a round object streak across the sky in a highly erratic flight path near the Army's secret White Sands Proving Ground. And on May 28, the crew of an Air Force C-47 had three UFO's barrel in from "12 o'clock high" to buzz their transport.

As the snow of the winter of 1948 turned to slush and then dried up, ATIC was deluged with UFO reports. Many of them were poor but the few good ones kept ATIC's interest high.

On February 18, 1948, the first reports from Norcatar, Kansas, had a UFO exploding in a blinding flash. The accompanying roar and shock wave stampeded livestock and broke windows. A hurried investigation proved that it was a visitor from outer space. In a matter of hours, Dr. Lincoln LaPaz of the University of New Mexico announced that it was an unusual and spectacular meteorite.

On the morning of April 5, three scientists at Holloman AFB, New Mexico, an Air Force installation adjacent to the Army's secret White sands Proving Ground, reported a round, indistinct form moving in a highly erratic path, faster than any airplane could travel. It was the same relative size as a dime held at arm's length. They watched it dart around the sky for 30 seconds before it suddenly vanished.

On May 28 the crew of an Air Force C-47, flying at 6,000 feet over Michigan, observed three disk-like objects descend from above the C-47, level off at the C-47's altitude, and zip by at a terrific speed. Soon two more followed. They were silver-gold in color.

On July 21, a curious report was received from the Netherlands. The day before several persons reported seeing a UFO through high broken clouds over The Hague. The object was rocket-shaped with two rows of windows along the side. It was a poor report, very sketchy and incomplete, and it probably would have been forgotten

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except that four nights later a similar UFO almost collided with an Eastern Airlines DC-3. This near collision is Volume II of "The Classics".

On the evening of July 24, 1948, an Eastern Airlines DC-3 took off from Houston, Texas. It was on a scheduled trip to Atlanta with intermediate stops in between. The pilots were Clarence S. Chiles and John B. Whitted. It was a bright moonlight night. The DC-3 was flying at 7,000 feet under a layer of scattered clouds. It was on a northeast heading, going toward Montgomery, Alabama. At about 2:45 AM, when the flight was twenty miles southwest of Montgomery, the captain, Chiles saw a light dead ahead and closing fast. His first reaction, he later reported to an ATIC investigation team, was that it was a jet, but in an instant he realized that even a Jet couldn't close as fast as this light was closing. Chiles said he reached over, gave Whitted, the other pilot, a quick tap on the arm and pointed. The UFO was now almost on top of them. Chiles racked the DC-3 up into a tight left turn. Just as UFO flashed by about 700 feet to the right, the DC-3 hit turbulent air. Whitted looked back just as the UFO pulled up into the clouds in a steep climb.

Both of the pilots had gotten a good look at the UFO and were able to give a good description to the Air Force intelligence people. It was a B-29 fuselage. The underside had a "deep blue glow". There were "two rows of windows from which bright lights glowed", and a "50 foot trail of orange-red flame" shot out the back.

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Only one passenger was looking out of the window at the time. The ATIC investigators talked to him. He said he saw a "strange, eerie streak of light, very intense", but that was all, no details. He said that it all happened before he could adjust his eyes to the darkness.

Minutes later a crew chief at Robbins Air Force Base in Macon, Georgia, reported seeing an extremely bright light pass overhead, traveling at a high speed. A few days later another report from the night of July 24, came in. A pilot, flying near the Virginia-South Carolina state line reported that he had seen a "bright shooting star" in the direction of Montgomery, Alabama at about the same exact time the Eastern Airlines DC-3 was "buzzed".

According to the old timers at ATIC this shook them more than the Mantell Incident. This was the first time two reliable sources had gotten close enough to anything resembling a UFO to get a good look and live to tell about it. A quick check on a map showed that the UFO that nearly collided with the airliner would have passed almost over Macon, Georgia, after passing the DC-3. It had been turning toward Macon when last seen. The story of the crew chief at Robbins AFB, 200 miles away, seemed to confirm the sighting, not to mention the report from near the Virginia-South Carolina state line.

In intelligence, if you have something to say about some vital problem you write a report that is known as an "Estimate of the Situation". A few days after the DC-3 was "buzzed", the people at ATIC decided that the time had arrived to make an Estimate of the Situation. The situation was the UFO; the estimate was that they were interplanetary.

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It was a rather thick document with a black cover and it was printed on legal size paper. Stamped across the front were the words TOP SECRET.

It contained the Air Force's analysis of many of the incidents which I have told you about plus many other similar ones. All of them had come from scientists, pilots and other equally as credible observers and each one was an "unknown."

*[It was a rather thick document, in a black cover, and on legal size paper. It was classified TOP SECRET. It concluded that UFO's were interplanetary. As documented proof, many unexplained sightings were quoted. The original UFO sighting by Kenneth Arnold, the series of sightings from the secret Air Force Test Center, Muroc AFB; the F-51 pilot's observation of a formation of spheres near Lake Meade; the report of an F-80 pilot who saw two round objects diving toward the ground near the Grand Canyon; and a report by the pilot of an Idaho National Guard T-6 trainer, who saw a violently maneuvering black object.]*

*[As further documentation, the report quoted an interview with an Air Force Major from the Rapid City AFB (now Ellsworth AFB) who saw twelve UFO's flying a tight formation. When he first saw them they were high but soon they went into a fantastically high speed dive, leveled out, made a perfect formation turn, and climbed at a 30 to 40 degree angle, accelerating all the time. The UFO's were oval-shaped and brilliant yellowish-white.]*

*[Also included was one of the reports from the Los Alamos laboratory. The incident occurred at 9:40 AM on September 23, 1948. A group of people were waiting for an airplane at the landing strip in Los Alamos when one of them noticed something glint in sun. It was a flat, circular object, high in the northern sky. The appearance and relative size was the same as a dime held edgewise and slightly tipped, about 50 feet away.]*

The document pointed out that the reports hadn't actually started with the Arnold incident. Belated reports from a weather observer in Richmond, Virginia, who observed a "silver disk" through

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his theodolite telescope; an F-47 pilot, and three pilots in his formation, who saw a "silver flying wing"; and the English "ghost airplanes" that had been picked up on radar early in 1947, proved this point. Although not received until after the the Arnold sighting, they all had taken place earlier.

When the Estimate was completed, typed, and approved, it started up through channels to higher command eschelons. It drew considerable comment but no one stopped it on its way up.

A matter of days after the Estimate of the Situation was signed, sealed and sent on it's way the third

big sighting of 1948, Volume III of the classics took place. The date was October 1, and the place was Fargo, North Dakota; it was the famous Gorman Incident in which a pilot fought a "duel" of death with a UFO.

The pilot was George F. Gorman, a 25-year-old second lieutenant in the North Dakota Air National Guard. It was 8:30 in the evening and Gorman was coming into Fargo from a cross-country flight. He had decided to do some night flying before he landed. He flew around Fargo for awhile and about 9:00 he decided to land so he called the control tower for landing instructions. He was told that a Piper cub was in the area. He saw the Cub below him. All of a sudden what appeared to be the tail light of another airplane passed him on his right. He called the tower and complained but they assured him that no other aircraft except the Cub were in the area. Gorman could still see the light so he decided to find out what it was. He pushed the F-51 over into a turn and cut in toward the light. He could plainly see the Cub outlined against the city lights below, but he could see no outline of a body near the mysterious light. He gave the '51 more power and closed to within a 1000

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yards, close enough to estimate that the light was 6 to 8 inches in diameter, was sharply outlined, and was blinking on and off. Suddenly the light became steady as it apparently put on power, it pulled into a sharp left bank and made a pass at the tower. The light zoomed up with the F-51 in hot pursuit. At 7,000 feet it made a turn. Gorman followed and tried to cut inside the light's turn to get closer to it but he couldn't do it. The light made another turn and this time the '51 closed on a collision course. The UFO appeared to try to ram the '51, and Gorman had to dive to get out of the way. The UFO passed over the '51's canopy with only a few feet to space. Again both the '51 and the object turned and closed on each other, head-on, and again the pilot had to dive out to prevent a collision. All of a sudden the light began to climb and disappeared.

"I had the distinct impression that its maneuvers were controlled by thought or reason," Gorman later told ATIC investigators.

Four other observers at Fargo partially corroborated his story, an oculist, Dr. A. D. Cannon, the Cub's pilot and his passenger, Einar Neilson. They saw a light "moving fast", but did not witness all the maneuvers that Gorman reported. Two CAA employees on the ground, saw a light move over the field once.

Project Sign investigators rushed to Fargo. They had wired ahead to ground the plane. They wanted to check it over before it flew again. When they arrived, only a matter of hours after the incident, they went over the airplane from the prop spinner, to the rudder trim tab with a Geiger counter. A chart in the official

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report shows where every Geiger counter reading was taken. For comparison they took readings on a similar airplane that hadn't been flown for several days. Gorman's airplane was more radioactive. They rushed around, got sworn statements from the tower operators and oculist, and flew back to Dayton.

In the file on The Gorman incident I found *[an old memo to Col. McCoy, then chief of ATIC. The memo] report[ed]ing* the meeting that was held upon the ATIC teams return from Fargo. *[The light that Gorman was assumed to be the planet Venus and it was assumed that it was radioactive. Several hours of discussion brought no concrete results but it did produce a good many theories. One man, Al Dayarmond, suggested, timidly I would guess from the description being presented, that the UFO might have been a weather balloon. Evidently his ideas were squelched, because t]* The memo concluded that some weird things were taking place.

The historians of the UFO agree. Major Donald Keyhoe, author of The Flying Saucers are Real and Flying Saucers From Outer Space, needles the Air Force about the Gorman incident pointing out how, after feebly hinting *[it] that the light* could have been a *lighted weather* balloon, they dropped it like a hot UFO. *[They had good reason to play it down, Keyhoe says.]* Some person by the name of Wilkinson, in an equally authoritative book, says that the Gorman incident "stumped" the Air Force. Other assorted historians point out that normally the UFO's are peaceful, Gorman and Mantell just got too inquisitive, "they" just weren't ready to be observed closely. If the Air Force hadn't slapped down the security lid, these writers might not have reached this conclusion. There have been other, and more lurid, "duels of death".

On June 21, 1952, at 10:58 PM, a Ground Observer corps spotter reported that a slow moving craft was nearing the AEC's Oak Ridge laboratory, an area so secret that it is prohibited to aircraft. The spotter called the light into his Filter Center and the Filter Center relayed the message to the Ground Control Intercept radar. They had a target. But before they could do more than confirm the GOC spotter's report, the target faded from the radar scope.

An F-47 aircraft on combat air patrol in the area was vectored in visually, spotted a light, and closed on it. They "fought" from 10,000 to 27,000 feet and several times the object made what seemed to be ramming attacks. The light was described as white, 6 to 8 inches in diameter and blinking until put on power. The pilot could see no silhouette around the light. The similarity to the Fargo case was striking.

On the night of December 10, 1952, near another atomic installation, the Hanford Plant in Washington, the pilot and radar observer of a patrolling F-94 spotted a light while flying at 26,000 feet. The crew called their ground control station and were told that no planes were known to be in the area. They closed on the object and saw a large, round, white "thing" with a dim, reddish light coming from two "windows". They lost visual contact, but got a radar lock-on. They reported that when they attempted to close on it again, it would reverse direction and dive away. Several times the plane altered course itself because collision seemed imminent.

In each of these instances, as well as in the case narrated next, the sources of the stories were trained airmen with excellent reputations.

They were sincerely baffled by what they had seen. They had no conceivable motive for falsifying or "dressing up" their reports,

The other "dogfight" occurred September 24, 1952, between a Navy pilot of TBM and a light over Cuba.

The pilot had just finished making some practice passes for night fighters when he spotted an orange light to the east of his plane. He checked on aircraft in the area, learned that the object was unidentified, and started after it. Here is his report, written immediately after he landed:

"As it (the light) approached the city from the east it started a left turn. I started to intercept. During the first part of the chase the closest I got to the light was 8 to 10 miles. At this time it appeared to be as large as an SNB and had a greenish tail that looked to be five to six times as long as the light's diameter. This tail was seen several times in the next 10 minutes in periods of 5 to 30 seconds each. As I reached 10,000 feet it appeared to be at 15,000 feet and in a left turn. It took 40 degrees of bank to keep the nose of my plane on the light. At this time I estimated the light to be in a 10 to 15 mile orbit.

"At 12,000 feet I stopped climbing, but the light was still climbing faster than I was. I then reversed my turn from left to right and the light also reversed. As I was not gaining distance, I held a steady course south trying to estimate a perpendicular between the Light and myself.

The light was moving north, so I turned north. As turned the light appeared to move west, then south over the base. I again tried to intercept but the light appeared to climb rapidly at a 60 degree angle. It climbed to 35,000 feet, then started a rapid descent.

"Prior to this, while the light was still at approximately 15,000 feet, I deliberately placed it between the moon and myself three times to try to identify a solid body. I, and my two crewmen, all had a good view of the light as it passed the moon. We could see no solid body. We considered the fact that it might be an aerologist's balloon, but we did not see a silhouette. Also, we would have rapidly caught up with and passed a balloon.

"During its descent, the light appeared to slow down at about 10,000 feet, at which time I made three runs on it. Two were on a 90 degree collision course, and the light traveled at

tremendous speed across my bow. On the third run I was so close that the light blanked out the airfield below me. Suddenly it started a dive and I followed, losing it at 1,500 feet."

In this incident the UFO was a balloon.

The following night, a lighted balloon was sent up and the pilot was ordered up to compare his experiences. He duplicated his "dogfight" -- illusions and all. The Navy furnished us with a long analysis of the affair, explaining how the pilot had been fooled.

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In the case involving the ground observer and the F-47 near the atomic installation, we plotted the winds and calculated that a balloon was right at the spot where the pilot encountered the light.

In the other instance, with the "white object with two windows", we found that a skyhook balloon had been plotted at the exact site of the "battle".

Gorman fought a lighted balloon, too. An analysis of the sighting by the Air Weather Service sent to ATIC in a letter dated January 24, 1949, proved it. The radioactive F-51 was decontaminated by a memo from a Wright Field laboratory explaining that a recently flown airplane will be more radioactive than one that has been on the ground for several days. An airplane at 20,000 to 30,000 feet picks up more cosmic rays than one shielded by the earth's ever present haze.

Why can't experienced pilots recognize a balloon when they see one? If they are flying at night, odd things can happen to their vision. There is the problem of vertigo, as well as disorientation brought on by flying without points of reference. Night fighters have told dozens of stories of being fooled by lights.

One night during World War II we had just dumped a load of bombs on a target when a "night fighter" started to make a pass at us. Everyone in the cockpit saw the fighter's red hot exhaust stack as he bore down on us. I cut loose with six calibre .50 machine guns. Fortunately I missed the "night fighter" -- if I'd have shot it I'd have fouled up the astronomers but good because the "night fighter" was Venus.

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*[While the people working on Project Sign were pondering over Lt. Gorman's "duel of death," before they found out that his advisory was a lighted weather balloon, two things were taking place. One, the higher The Estimate of the Situation went in the Air Force chain of command the cooler the reception it got, and two, reports of radar picking up UFO's began to come in. How far this estimate got is something that I could never determine, but it got up into the high echelons of the Air Force before it was batted back down. The reason for batting it down was that the conclusions, interplanetary vehicles, lacked proof. A group from ATIC went to the Pentagon to sell the idea to the late General Hoyt S. Vandenburg, then Chief of Staff of the Air Force, but had no luck. The evidence didn't impress him enough to make him decide to buy the interplanetary theory.]*

*While the people on Project Sign were pondering over Lt. Gorman's "dogfight" with the UFO--at the time they weren't even considering the balloon angle--the TOP SECRET Estimate of the Situation was working its way up into the higher echelons of the Air Force. It got to the late Hoyt S. Vandenburg, then Chief of Staff, before it was batted back down, The General wouldn't buy interplanetary vehicles. The report lacked proof. A group from ATIC went to the Pentagon to bolster their position but had no luck, the Chief of Staff just couldn't be convinced.*

The Estimate died a quick death. Some months later it was completely declassified and relegated to the incinerator. A few copies, one of which I saw, were kept as mementos of the golden days of the UFO's.

The top Air Force command's refusal to buy the interplanetary theory didn't have any immediate effect upon the morale Project Sign because the reports were getting better.

A belated report that is more of a collector's item than a good UFO sighting came into ATIC in the Fall of 1948. It was from Moscow. Someone, I could never find out exactly who, reported a huge "smudge-like" object in the sky.

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Then radar came into the picture. For months the "anti-saucer" factions had been pointing their

finger at the lack of radar reports saying, "If they exist why don't they show up on radar scopes?" When they showed up on the radar scopes the UFO won some converts.

On October 15, a F-61, a World War II "Black Widow" night fighter, was on patrol over Japan when it picked up an unidentified target on its radar. The target was flying between 5,000 and 6,000 feet and traveling about 200 mph. When the F-61 tried to intercept it would get to within 12,000 feet of the UFO only to have it accelerate to an estimated 1200 mph leaving the F-61 far behind before slowing down again. The F-61 crew made six attempts to close on the UFO. On one pass the crew said they did get close enough to see its silhouette. It was 20 to 30 feet long, and looked like a rifle bullet.

*[The radar station at Goose Bay, Labrador, had a series of UFO radar pickups. On the 29th and 30th of October and on the 1st of November the station detected low, slow moving targets in the area. At one time two of the targets were on a collision course. The weather was foggy and the radar operator thought they might be aircraft, although no known aircraft were in the area. To be safe he called them in the blind, "Two unidentified aircraft south of field, you are on a collision course." He looked at the scope and the two colliding targets veered away from each other. Five years later over Chicago on a foggy night, a Lt. McGilicudy was closing in on a UF'O in his radar equipped F-86. He was talking to his ground station on a restricted tactical UHF radio channel using only his call sign, not his name. All of a sudden a voice cut in. In a weird drawn out tone it said, (illegible) "G \_\_\_\_\_st \_\_\_\_\_ McGilicudy" ????????? ]*

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Toward the end of November a wire came into Project Sign from Germany. It was the first report where a UFO was seen and simultaneously picked up on radar. This type of report, the first of many to come, is one of the better types of UFO reports. The wire said:

"At 2200 hours, local time, 23 November 1948, Capt. Hugh Slater saw an object in the air directly east of this base. It was at an unknown altitude. It looked like a reddish star and was moving in a southerly direction across Munich turning slightly to the southwest then the southeast. The speed could have been between 200 to 600 mph, the actual speed could not be estimated, not knowing the height. Capt. Slater called base operations and they called the radar station. Radar reported that they had seen nothing on their scope but would check again. Radar then called operations to report that they did have a target at 27,000 feet, some 30 miles south of Munich, traveling at 900 mph. Capt. Slater reported that the object that he saw was now in that area. A few minutes later radar called again to say that the target had climbed to 50,000 feet, and was circling 40 miles south of Munich.

"Capt. Slater is an experienced pilot now flying F-80's and is considered to be completely reliable. The sighting was verified by Capt. Addis, also an F-80 pilot.

The possibility of this being a balloon was checked but the answer from Air Weather Service was "not a balloon". No aircraft were in the area. Nothing we know of, except possibly experimental aircraft, which are not in Germany, can climb 23,000 feet in a matter of minutes and travel 900 mph.

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By the end of 1948 Project Sign had received several hundred reports. Of these, 167 had been saved as good reports. About three dozen were "unknown". Even though the UFO reports were getting better and more numerous, the enthusiasm over the interplanetary idea was cooling off. The same people who had fought to get to go to Godman AFB to talk to Col. Hix and his UFO observers in January, now had to be prodded when a sighting needed investigating. More and more work was being pushed off onto the other investigative organization that was helping ATIC. The kickback on the Top Secret Estimate of the Situation *was beginning to [had]* dampened a lot of enthusiasms. It was definitely a bear market for UFO's.

A bull market was on the way, however. Early 1949 was to bring "little lights" and green fireballs. The "little lights" were UFO's, but the green fireballs were real.