

THE RADIATION STORY

by Capt. Edward Ruppelt

The idea for gathering together a group of scientists, to whom we referred as our "panel of experts," had been conceived early in 1952 - as soon as serious talk about the possibility that the UFO's might be interplanetary spaceships had taken hold in both military and scientific circles. In fact, when Project Grudge was reorganized in the summer of 1951 the idea had been mentioned, and this was the main reason that our charter had said we were to be only a fact finding group. The people on previous UFO projects had gone off on tangents of speculation about the identity of the UFO's; they first declared that they were spacecraft, then later, in a complete about face, they took the whole UFO problem as one big belly laugh. Both approaches had gotten the Air Force into trouble. Why they did this I don't know, because from the start we realized that no one at ATIC, in the Air Force, or in the whole military establishment was qualified to give a final yes or no answer to the UFO problem. Giving a final answer would require a serious decision - probably one of the most serious since the beginning of man.

During 1952 many highly qualified engineers and scientists had visited Project Blue Book and had spent a day or two going over our reports. Some were very much impressed with the reports - some had all the answers. But all of the scientists who read our reports readily admitted that even though they may have thought that the reports did or did not indicate visitors from outer space, they would want to give the subject a good deal more study before they ever committed themselves in writing. Consequently the people's opinions, although they were valuable, didn't give us enough to base a decision upon. We still needed a group to study our material thoroughly and give us written conclusions and recommendations which could be sent to the President if necessary.

Our panel of experts was to consist of six or eight of the top scientists in the United States. We fully realized that even the Air Force didn't have enough "pull" just to ask all of these people to drop the important work they were engaged in and spend a week or two studying our reports. Nor did we want to do it this way; we wanted to be sure that we had something worth while before asking for their valuable time. So, working through other government agencies, we organized a preliminary review panel of four people. All of them were competent scientists and we knew their reputations were such that if they recommended that a certain top scientist sit on a panel to review our material he would do it.

In late November 1952 the preliminary review panel met at ATIC for three days. When the meeting ended, the group unanimously recommended that a "higher court" be formed to review the case of the UFO. In an hour their

recommendation was accepted by higher Air Force authorities, and the men proceeded to recommend the members for our proposed panel.

They picked six men who had reputations as being both practical and theoretical scientists and who were known to have no biased opinions regarding the UFO's.

The meeting of the panel, which would be held in Washington, was tentatively scheduled for late December or early January - depending upon when all of the scientists who had been asked to attend would be free. At Project Blue Book activity went into high gear as we made preparations for the meeting. But before we were very far along our preparations were temporarily sidetracked - I got a lead on the facts behind a rumor. Normally we didn't pay attention to rumors, but this one was in a different class.

Ever since the Air Force had become interested in UFO reports, the comment of those who had been requested to look them over and give a professional opinion was that we lacked the type of data "you could get your teeth into." In even our best reports we had to rely upon what someone had seen. I'd been told many times that if we had even one piece of information that was substantiated by some kind of recorded proof - a set of cinetheodolite movies of a UFO, a spectrum photograph, or any other kind of instrumented data that one could sit down and study - we would have no difficulty getting almost any scientist in the world interested in actively helping us find the answer to the UFO riddle.

The rumor that caused me to temporarily halt our preparations for the high level conference involved data that we might be able to get our teeth into.

This is the way it went:

In the fall of 1949, at some unspecified place in the United States, a group of scientists had set up equipment to measure background radiation, the small amount of harmless radiation that is always present in our atmosphere. This natural radiation varies to a certain degree, but will never increase by any appreciable amount unless there is a good reason.

According to the rumor, two of the scientists at the unnamed place were watching the equipment one day when, for no apparent reason, a sudden increase of radiation was indicated. The radiation remained high for a few seconds, then dropped back to normal. The increase over normal was not sufficient to be dangerous, but it definitely was unusual. All indications pointed to equipment malfunction as the most probable explanation. A quick check revealed no obvious trouble with the gear, and the two scientists were about to start a more detailed check when a third member of the radiation crew came rushing into the lab.

Before they could tell the newcomer about the unexplained radiation they had just picked up, he blurted out a story of his own. He had driven to a nearby town, and on his return trip, as he approached the research lab, something in the sky suddenly caught his eye. High in the cloudless blue he saw three silvery objects moving in a V formation. They appeared to be spherical in shape, but

he wasn't sure. The first fact that had hit him was that the objects were traveling too fast to be conventional aircraft. He jammed on the brakes, stopped his car, and shut off the engine. No sound. All he could hear was the quiet whir of a generator in the research lab. In a few seconds the objects had disappeared from sight.

After the first two scientists had briefed their excited colleague on the unusual radiation they had detected, the three men asked each other the \$64 question: Was there any connection between the two incidents? Had the UFO's caused the excessive radiation?

They checked the time. Knowing almost exactly when the instruments had registered the increased radiation, they checked on how long it took to drive to the lab from the point where the three silver objects had been seen. The times correlated within a minute or two. The three men proceeded to check their radiation equipment thoroughly. Nothing was wrong.

The rumor stopped here. Nothing that I or anyone else on Project Blue Book could find out shed any further light on the source of the story. People associated with projects similar to the research lab that was mentioned in the rumor were sought out and questioned. Many of them had heard the story, but no one could add any new details. The three unknown scientists, at the unnamed lab, in an unknown part of the United States, might as well never have existed. Maybe they hadn't.

Almost a year after I had first heard the UFO radiation story I got a long-distance call from a friend on the west coast. I had seen him several months before, at which time I told him about this curious rumor and expressed my wish to find out how authentic it was. Now, on the phone, he told me he had just been in contact with two people he knew and they had the whole story. He said they would be in Los Angeles the following night and would like very much to talk to me.

I hated to fly clear to the west coast on what might be a wild goose chase, but I did. I couldn't afford to run the risk of losing an opportunity to turn that old recurrent rumor into fact.

Twenty hours later I met the two people at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel. We talked for several hours that night, and I got the details on the rumor and a lot more that I hadn't bargained for. Both of my informants were physicists working for the Atomic Energy Commission, and were recognized in their fields. They wanted no publicity and I promised them that they would get none. One of the men knew all the details behind the rumor, and did most of the talking. To keep my promise of no publicity, I'll call him the "scientist."

The rumor version of the UFO radiation story that had been kicking around in Air Force and scientific circles for so long had been correct in detail but it was by no means complete. The scientist said that after the initial sighting had taken place word was spread at the research lab that the next time the instruments registered abnormal amounts of radiation, some of the personnel were to go outside immediately and look for some object in the sky.

About three weeks after the first incident a repetition did occur. While excessive radiation was registering on the instruments in the lab, a lone dark object was seen streaking across the sky. Again the instruments were checked but, as before, no malfunction was found.

After this second sighting, according to the scientist, an investigation was started at the laboratory. The people who made the visual observations weren't sure that the object they had seen couldn't have been an airplane. Someone thought that perhaps some type of radar equipment in the airplane, if that's what the object was, might have affected the radiation- detection equipment. So arrangements were made to fly all types of aircraft over the area with their radar in operation. Nothing unusual happened. All possible types of airborne research equipment were traced during similar flights in the hope that some special equipment not normally carried in aircraft would be found to have caused the jump in radiation. But nothing out of the ordinary occurred during these tests either.

It was tentatively concluded, the scientist continued, that the abnormally high radiation readings were "officially" due to some freakish equipment malfunction and that the objects sighted visually were birds or airplanes. A report to this effect was made to military authorities, but since the conclusion stated that no flying saucers were involved, the report went into some unknown file. Project Blue Book never got it.

Shortly after the second UFO radiation episode the research group finished its work. It was at this time that the scientist had first become aware of the incidents he related to me. A friend of his, one of the men involved in the sightings, had sent the details in a letter.

As the story of the sightings spread it was widely discussed in scientific circles, with the result that the conclusion, an equipment malfunction, began to be more seriously questioned. Among the scientists who felt that further investigation of such phenomena was in order, were the man to whom I was talking and some of the people who had made the original sightings.

About a year later the scientist and these original investigators were working together. They decided to make a few more tests, on their own time, but with radiation detection equipment so designed that the possibility of malfunction would be almost nil. They formed a group of people who were interested in the project, and on evenings and weekends assembled and set up their equipment in an abandoned building on a small mountain peak. To insure privacy and to avoid arousing undue interest among people not in on the project, the scientist and his colleagues told everyone that they had formed a mineral club. The "mineral club" deception covered their weekend expeditions because "rock hounds" are notorious for their addiction to scrambling around on mountains in search for specimens.

The equipment that the group had installed in the abandoned building was designed to be self operating. Geiger tubes were arranged in a pattern so that some idea as to the direction of the radiation source could be obtained. During

the original sightings the equipment malfunction factor could not be definitely established or refuted because certain critical data had not been measured.

To get data on visual sightings, the "mineral club" had to rely on the flying saucer grapevine, which exists at every major scientific laboratory in the country.

By late summer of 1950 they were in business. For the next three months the scientist and his group kept their radiation equipment operating twenty-four hours a day, but the tapes showed nothing except the usual background activity. The saucer grapevine reported sightings in the general area of the tests, but none close to the instrumented mountain top.

The trip to the instrument shack, which had to be made every two days to change tapes, began to get tiresome for the "rock hounds," and there was some talk of discontinuing the watch.

But persistence paid off. Early in December, about ten o'clock in the morning, the grapevine reported sightings of a silvery, circular shaped object near the instrument shack. The UFO was seen by several people.

When the "rock hounds" checked the recording tapes in the shack they found that several of the Geiger tubes had been triggered at 10:17 A.M. The registered radiation increase was about 100 times greater than the normal background activity.

Three more times during the next two months the "mineral club's" equipment recorded abnormal radiation on occasions when the grapevine reported visual sightings of UFO's. One of the visual sightings was substantiated by radar.

After these incidents the "mineral club" kept its instruments in operation until June 1951, but nothing more was recorded. And, curiously enough, during this period while the radiation level remained normal, the visual sightings in the area dropped off too. The "mineral club" decided to concentrate on determining the significance of the data they had obtained.

Accordingly, the scientist and the group made a detailed study of their mountain top findings. They had friends working on many research projects throughout the United States and managed to visit and confer with them while on business trips. They investigated the possibility of unusual sunspot activity, but sunspots had been normal during the brief periods of high radiation. To clinch the elimination of sunspots as a cause, their record tapes showed no burst of radiation when sunspot activity had been abnormal.

The "rock hounds" checked every possible research project that might have produced some stray radiation for their instruments to pick up. They found nothing. They checked and rechecked their instruments, but could find no factor that might have induced false readings. They let other scientists in on their findings, hoping that these outsiders might be able to put their fingers on errors that had been overlooked.

Now, more than a year after the occurrence of the mysterious incidents that they had recorded, a year spent in analyzing their data, the "rock hounds" had no answer.

By the best scientific tests that they had been able to apply, the visual sightings and the high radiation had taken place more or less simultaneously.

Intriguing ideas are hard to kill, and this one had more than one life, possibly because of the element of mystery which surrounds the subject of flying saucers. But the scientific mind thrives on taking the mystery out of unexplained events, so it is not surprising that the investigation went on.

According to my friend the scientist, a few people outside the laboratory where the "rock hounds" worked were told about the activities of the "mineral club," and they started radiation detection groups of their own.

For instance, two graduate astronomy students from a southwestern university started a similar watch, on a modest scale, using a modified standard Geiger counter as their detection unit. They did not build a recorder into their equipment, however, and consequently were forced to man their equipment continuously, which naturally cut down the time they were in operation. On two occasions they reportedly detected a burst of high radiation.

Although the veracity of the two astronomers was not doubted, the scientist felt that the accuracy of their readings was poor because of the rather low quality of their equipment.

The scientist then told me about a far more impressive effort to verify or disprove the findings of the "mineral club." Word of the "rock hounds" and their work had also spread to a large laboratory in the East. An Air Force colonel, on duty at the lab, told the story to some of his friends, and they decided to look personally into the situation.

Fortunately these people were in a wonderful spot to make such an investigation. At their laboratory an extensive survey of the surrounding area was being made. An elaborate system of radiation detection equipment had been set up for a radius of 100 miles around the lab. In addition, the defenses of the area included a radar net.

Thanks to the flashing of silver eagles, the colonel's group got permission to check the records of the radiation survey station and to look over the logs of the radar stations. They found instances where, during the same period of time that radiation in the area had been much higher than normal, radar had had a UFO on the scope. These events had occurred during the period from January 1951 until about June 1951.

Upon learning of the tentative but encouraging findings that the colonel's group had dug out of their past records, people on both the radiation survey crews and at the radar sites became interested in co-operating for further investigation. A tie-in with the local saucer grapevine established a three way check. One evening in July, just before sunset, two of the colonel's group were driving home from the laboratory. As they sped along the highway they noticed

two cars stopped ahead of them. The occupants were standing beside the road, looking at something in the sky.

The two scientists stopped, got out of their car, and scanned the sky too. Low on the eastern horizon they saw a bright circular object moving slowly north. They watched it for a while, took a few notes, then drove back to the lab.

Some interesting news awaited them there. Radar had picked up an unidentified target near the spot where the scientists in the car had seen the UFO, and it had been traveling north. A fighter had been scrambled, but when it got into the proper area, the radar target was off the scope. The pilot glimpsed something that looked like the reported UFO, but before he could check further he had to turn into the sun to get on an interception course, and he lost the object.

Several days passed before the radiation reports from all stations could be collected. When the reports did come in they showed that stations east of the laboratory, on an approximate line with the radar track, had shown the highest increase in radiation. Stations west of the lab showed nothing.

The possible significance of this well covered incident spurred the colonel's group to extend and refine their activities. Their idea was to build a radiation detection instrument in an empty wing tank and hang the tank on an F-47. Then when a UFO was reported they would fly a search pattern in the area and try to establish whether or not a certain sector of the sky was more radioactive than other sectors. Also, they proposed to build a highly directional detector for the F-47 and attempt actually to track a UFO.

The design of such equipment was started, but many delays occurred. Before the colonel's group could get any of the equipment built, some of the members left the lab for other jobs, and the colonel, who sparked the operation, was himself transferred elsewhere. The entire effort collapsed.

The scientist was not surprised that I hadn't heard the story of the colonel's group. All the people involved, he said, had kept it quiet in order to avoid ridicule. The scientist added that he would be glad to give me all the data he had on the sightings of his "mineral club," and he told me where to get the information about the two astronomers and the colonel's group.

Armed with the scientist's notes and recorder tapes, I left for my office at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Dayton.

With the blessings of my chief, I started to run down the rest of the radiation information. The data we had, especially that from the scientist's "mineral club," had been thoroughly analyzed, but we thought that since we now had access to more general data something new and more significant might be found.

First I contacted the government agency for which all of the people involved in these investigations had been working, the scientists who recorded the original incident, the scientist and his "mineral club," the colonel's group, and the rest.

The people in the agency were very co-operative but stressed the fact that the activities I was investigating were strictly the extracurricular affairs of the scientists involved, had no official sanction, and should not be tied in with the agency in any way, shape, or form. This closed door reaction was typical of how the words "flying saucer" seem to scare some people.

They did help me locate the report on the original incident, however, and since it seemed to be the only existing copy, I arranged to borrow it.

About this same time we located the two graduate astronomy students in New Mexico. Both now had their Ph.D.'s and held responsible jobs on highly classified projects. They repeated their story, which I had first heard from the scientist, but had kept no record of their activities.

On one occasion, just before dawn on a Sunday morning, they were on the roof, making some meteorological observations. One of them was listening to the Geiger counter when he detected a definite increase in the clicking.

Just as the frequency of the clicks reached its highest peak - almost a steady buzz - a large fireball, described by them as "spectacular," flashed across the sky. Both of the observers had seen several of the green fireballs and said that this object was similar in all respects except that the color was a brilliant blue white.

With the disappearance of the fireball, the counter once more settled down to a steady click per second. They added that once before they had detected a similar increase in the frequency of the clicks but had seen nothing in the sky.

In telling their story, both astronomers stressed the point that their data were open to a great deal of criticism, mainly because of the limited instrumentation they had used. We agreed. Still their work tended to support the findings of the more elaborate and systematic radiation investigations.

The gods who watch over the UFO project were smiling about this time, because one morning I got a call from a colonel on Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. He was going to be in our area that morning and planned to stop in to see me.

He arrived in a few minutes and turned out to be none other than the colonel who had headed the group which had investigated UFO's and radiation at the eastern laboratory. He repeated his story. It was the same as I had heard from the scientist, with a few insignificant changes. The colonel had no records of his group's operations, but knew who had them. He promised to get a wire off to the person immediately, which he did.

The answer was a bit disappointing. During the intervening months the data had been scattered out among the members of the colonel's group, and when the group broke up, so did its collection of records.

So all we had to fall back on was the colonel's word, but since he now was heading a top priority project at Wright, it would be difficult not to believe him.

After obtaining the colonel's story, we collected all available data concerning known incidents in which there seemed to be a correlation between the visual sighting of UFO's and the presence of excess atomic radiation in the area of the sightings.

There was one last thing to do. I wanted to take the dates and times of all the reported radiation increases and check them against all sources of UFO reports. This project would take a lot of leg work and digging, but I felt that it would offer the most positive and complete evidence we could assemble as to whether or not a correlation existed.

Accordingly, we dug into our files, ADC radar logs, press wire service files, newspaper morgues in the sighting area, and the files of individuals who collect data on saucers. Whenever we found a visual report that correlated with a radiation peak we checked it against weather conditions, balloon tracks, astronomical reports, etc.

As soon as the data had all been assembled, I arranged for a group of Air Force consultants to look it over. I got the same old answer - the data still aren't good enough. The men were very much interested in the reports, but when it came time to putting their comments on paper they said, "Not enough conclusive evidence." If in some way the UFO's could have been photographed at the same time that the radiation detectors were going wild, it would have been a different story, they later told me, but with the data I had for them this was the only answer they could give. No one could explain the sudden bursts of radiation, but there was no proof that they were associated with UFO's.

The board's ruling wrote finish to this investigation. I informed the colonel, and he didn't like the decision. Later I passed through the city where the scientist was working. I stopped over a few hours to brief him on the board's decision. He shook his head in disbelief.

It is interesting to note that both the colonel and the scientist reacted in the same way. We're not fools - we were there - we saw it - they didn't. What do they want for proof?