

AF Explanation Backfires

An AF-backed magazine story entitled "These Saucers Nearly Fooled The Air Force," has now been revealed as either a clumsy debunking effort or a rather incredible blunder.

Ostensibly describing a close-guarded "mystery" of strange radar blips received at Anderson AFB, Guam, the story was written by Lloyd Mallan with full AF cooperation. It appeared in the May 7th issue of This Week Magazine.

As approved by the AF, the Mallan article describes how a Guam radarscope picked up mysterious blips indicating that unknown, maneuvering objects were nearby or overhead, although nothing could be observed visually. According to the story, the mysterious blips, seen from August 2 to 9, 1966, remained unexplained for ten months. During this time, Mallan says, the reports were classified as secret, and the matter was considered so important that AF, Federal Aviation Agency and other radar experts were sent to Guam to investigate.

The unidentified blips, the experts at last discovered, were caused by "propagation anomalies"—with "electrified portions of the atmosphere acting as giant, invisible lenses." Disclosing this solution of the mystery, Mallan cites as his source the AF-provided "Final Report on the Investigation of FAA phenomena, Anderson AFB, 2-9 August 1966."

Since then, the unclassified portions of this report have been examined by Dr. J. E. McDonald, senior physicist, Institute of Atmospheric Physics, University of Arizona. Dr. McDonald, widely accepted as an authority on radar, has made an extensive study of UFO evidence, under a grant from his university.

The technical analysis sent to NICAP by Dr. McDonald is too long to present here, but the gist is simple enough.

Neither the "sighting" nor the AF-FAA explanation have the slightest relevance to the real UFO problem. What "nearly fooled the AF" was not a "saucer" phenomenon but a readily understandable effect within the radar system. The case does not involve UFOs and never did. The only mystery is why it took the AF and FAA and a team of so-called experts ten months to discover what was happening.

In his evaluation, Dr. McDonald shows that the strange blips resulted from a combination of factors, all of which should have been quickly recognized by operating personnel. The blips were first noted when increased C-141 traffic began moving to Vietnam, along airlines just outside the nominal 200-mile range of the Anderson AFB surveillance radars. The C-141's carried a new higher-output transponder causing a response beyond Guam's normal range. Though the results described by Dr. McDonald, are technical, the basic points are included so the AF cannot claim any evasion of the facts:

1. The Guam "Identification, Friend or Foe" radar output involved staggered modes with two distinct types of IFF codes being sent out via alternating pulses.
2. The "mysterious blips" were strictly IFF blips, received at Guam as so-called "second-return echoes," from aircraft beyond 200 miles.
3. These echoes were automatically "gated" into portions of the system designed to listen for IFF returns in the second mode, though emitted (by the C-141's) in the first mode. Hence they were displayed as "invalid" blips.

But, Dr. McDonald emphasizes, these blips' characteristic hyperbolic trajectories and descending and rising motions were [or should have been. Ed.] readily explained in terms of the geometry of the problem of second-return echoes. This, states Dr. McDonald, is a rather simple matter that no one notices until the team of experts was flown out from the U.S.

Commenting on the apparent garbling in the Mallan story, Dr. McDonald says:

"If this article was checked and approved by the Pentagon personnel who released the report to Mallan, then they must themselves have missed the entire point of the investigative team's analysis. If it was not checked, following special release to Mallan of the previously classified report, it should have been, for its net effect on knowledgeable readers will have been to arouse suspicion over a seemingly unreasonable 'explanation' of a UFO case."

It is more than probable, however, that Mallan's article was not aimed at any such knowledgeable audience, but at the much larger number of readers who do not know enough about radar to realize

when seemingly authoritative pronouncements are false. The most significant aspect of this case is the way the Air Force used it:

First, they gave it an air of hush-hush importance by classifying the entire period. They then released it to a "friendly writer, one who had defended Project Blue Book in previous articles. Finally, they allowed or encouraged the writer to publish this so-called explanation of a so-called UFO mystery, even though the mystery had nothing to do with UFOs and the explanation was not the right one.

DITTER PHOTOS REJECTED

Two of the most widely publicized UFO photographs of recent years have failed to survive an intense analysis by NICAP. Taken November 13, 1966, by barbershop-owner Ralph Ditter, 40, of Roseville, Ohio (see page 7, UFO Investigator, Vol. III/No. 11), the pictures evaluations contradict Ditter's report of a car-sized object hovering over his home and moving off over his yard in the space of approximately a minute and a half. The present evidence indicates that a small object of only a few feet in width was suspended before the camera, with a multi-minute time lapse between the two exposures.

The first of two major discrepancies between the pictures and the report was discovered at the outset of the analysis. According to Ditter, he took the first picture when the UFO was over the house, snapped another that did not turn out, and took a third while the UFO was departing. However, on the prints submitted to NICAP—prints certified in writing by Ditter as the original Polaroid photographs—the number on the alleged first photo is 8 and on the alleged third photo 6. Since there is no significant possibility that Polaroid film can be manufactured in misnumbered rolls (NICAP checked this), there are only two reasonable explanations for the numbering discrepancy: either the prints submitted to NICAP were not the originals, or Ditter's report is erroneous. Examination of the prints by NICAP's photographic consultant showed the former alternative to be most improbable.

The second discrepancy came to light when a study was made of the shadows in each picture. Although to the untrained eye there may appear to be no change in the position of any given shadow from one picture to the other, there is in fact considerable change. Three independent shadow analyses were conducted (each without consultants' knowledge of the other two), and all agreed that far more time elapsed between the pictures than the brief interval reported by Ditter.

In addition to NICAP's analysis, a special study of the Ditter photos was performed by the Raytheon Company, an aerospace firm, as an unsolicited demonstration of the company's photo-analytic capability for the University of Colorado's UFO project. Approached informally by Raytheon for a photo case suitable for technical evaluation, NICAP suggested the Ditter pictures because they contained the desired detail and provided Raytheon's analyst with copies of them and with supporting data. The analyst made instrumented measurements at the site where the alleged UFO pictures were taken (Ditter's front yard) and developed special mathematical equations for determination of the critical unknowns. Performed in part by an electronic computer, the study disclosed the same discrepancies previously uncovered by NICAP.

During NICAP's contacts with Ditter, he gave no indication of attempting to execute a deception. Until NICAP sought him out to secure details of his supposed sighting, his only public use of the UFO pictures was to display them in his barbershop as an item for conversation. The only clue NICAP found as to whether he might have been predisposed to produce trick photos was his strong interest in photography and in subjects related to UFOs. He is an amateur astronomer, a collector of materials on space travel, and an avocational photographer who has been known to experiment with special camera techniques.

On completion of its analysis, NICAP confronted Ditter with the evidence against his claim of having photographed a true UFO. To the discrepancy in the numbers on the prints, Ditter answered that copies must have been inadvertently switched for at least one of the originals during the many periods when he loaned the originals to friends. Told that the prints given to NICAP gave every indication of being originals, he offered no further explanation. To the discrepancy of the time lapse, he had no comment other than that he would not change his original report.