
WALESVILLE REVISITED

BY KEVIN D. RANDLE

UFO/military aircraft encounters are potentially some of the most sensational UFO accounts in our case files. There have been stories about military jet chases with UFOs almost since the first UFO wave in the United States in June 1947. Confirming these reports is never easy because of the secrecy around military operations, especially when the chase may have involved an aircraft accident or, in the worst case, injury or death to the pilot.

This makes the Walesville, New York, jet chase of a UFO one of the potentially most important because, unfortunately, the aftermath of the event was the death of four innocent civilians on the ground. And because of the civilian deaths, the July 2, 1954, incident was widely reported immediately afterwards, including a story in the *New York Times*.

The incident at Walesville has been reported in many UFO books, including those of Major Donald E. Keyhoe, *Clear Intent* by Barry Greenwood and Larry Fawcett (1984), and *Flying Saucers—Serious Business* by Frank Edwards (1966). The gist of the encounter, as it has been variously described in these books, is that a jet interceptor, scrambled from Griffiss Air Force Base (some sources have erroneously called it Griffis or Griffith) in Rome, New York, chased a flying saucer that had been spotted on radar. The F-94 was guided to the target by a radar officer in the backseat. The pilot spotted a “gleaming disc-shaped machine” and began to close in. At that point, the cockpit filled with heat and both the pilot and radar officer bailed out, suspecting a fire. To their horror, they watched as the jet flew on, then dived out of the sky, slamming into a house and a car, killing four people.

According to Jacques Vallee in a dialogue with J. Allen Hynek in *The Edge of Reality* (1975), there had been a dense cloud cover when the UFO had been picked up on radar. Two jets were scrambled, one that remained in the clouds and a second that climbed to a higher altitude. When the aircraft broke through the clouds, the pilot saw the UFO coming at him. The cockpit filled with heat and both men believed the jet was about to burst into flames. They bailed

out and landed safely, but the aircraft crashed in Walesville to the southeast.

J. Allen Hynek suggested that the case wasn't documented, but Vallee responded, “Yes, it is documented. It was even mentioned in the *New York Times* the next day.” Somehow, having a photograph of the accident site in the *New York Times* proved that a UFO knocked the plane down.

Otto Binder, writing in *What We Really Know About Flying Saucers* (1967), suggests that it was the radar officer who first sighted the UFO. He pointed it out to the pilot, who in turn attempted to get closer for a better look. When the cockpit began to fill with heat, both men bailed out. Binder claimed that both officers were interrogated at length by Air Force investigators who concluded they were not responsible for the disaster. They had followed Air Force regulations and had been driven from the cockpit by heat. According to Binder, there was only one source for the heat and that was the UFO. Binder claimed that his account was based on Air Force records.

Donald Keyhoe wrote about the encounter shortly after it occurred, in his book *The Flying Saucer Conspiracy* (1955). His description of the case does add drama to the event. (“Frantically he [the pilot] looked around. The radar officer's face was a blur in the waves of heat. At any moment it seemed the whole plane might burst into flames.”) Keyhoe notes that there was one UFO, above the aircraft, and that the heat in the cockpit occurred only when the plane was closing on the UFO.

In his last book *Aliens from Space* (1973), Keyhoe wrote that an officer at Air Force headquarters gave him additional, inside information about the case. The source stated, “That F-94 pilot said there was a separate effect besides the heat. Something made his mind black out—he couldn't even remember bailing out. He did recall the sudden heat and he saw the radar observer eject himself. But everything was a blank from then on until his parachute opened. . . . The pilot begged the AF to let him talk privately with the relatives of that family [who were killed] and the people who got hurt, so they'd know what really happened. But they [the Air Force] wouldn't let him. Both of those men were really muzzled.”

Provided that the accounts above are accurate, and that

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we can locate appropriate documentation, the Walesville case would seem to provide strong evidence that UFOs are real, physical craft, and that they are hostile, at least in this one instance. There is no other apparent explanation for the heat inside the interceptor, except some sort of interference or attack by the UFO. This is because no fire was ever discovered in the plane's engine after the crash. And the radar sighting provides seemingly strong evidence that something real and not illusory was seen over New York State that day.

However, the facts are not this clear cut. As was true so often of ufology in the early days, very few active UFO investigators existed. Most writers didn't go into the field and interview witnesses at the site of UFO encounters, but instead relied on newspaper clippings and other sources. Keyhoe did interview witnesses and seek official documents, but he was unable to in this instance because the military forbade the pilots from talking, and the accident report was kept secret. This allowed UFO writers to engage in speculation about events.

Still, a bit of digging would have uncovered some important details. The problem is that the various authors took two separate events and combined them into a single, spectacular UFO case. When the events are properly separated, the answers may then be found.

According to both news and official sources, there was a UFO sighting over Rome, New York, also on July 2, but in the evening. (Walesville is to the southeast.) The *New York Times* carried this story on July 3:

UTICA, N.Y., July 2 (AP)—A silvery, balloon-like object floating high over the Utica area tonight sent residents rushing to their telephones to make inquiries of newspapers, police and radio stations.

The Utica Press estimated that more than 1,000 calls about the object jammed its switchboard between 6 and 10 P.M. It was reported sighted by residents in a twenty-five-mile radius extending from Rome on the west to Frankfort, east of Utica.

Col. Milton F. Summerfelt, commandant of the Air Force Depot at Rome, said the object appeared to be a plastic balloon about forty feet long and partially deflated. He theorized that it was making a gradual descent and said that if it was still were in the area tomorrow morning a plane would be sent to investigate.

A Mohawk Airlines pilot estimated the altitude of the object at about 20,000 feet. He said he saw a light apparently shining from it.

For some reason, Keyhoe and a few other sources have given July 1 as the date of the balloon sighting and sometimes for the jet crash as well. A confusion of the two events might explain how the description of a disc-shaped object originated. Since both incidents were reported in the same general area (and probably on the same day), the confusion is understandable.

The Project Blue Book files tell the jet-crash story in a

slightly different way from that given by Keyhoe, Vallee, and others. Neither incident is part of Blue Book's official cases. The index for Project Blue Book, which does list the accident, also notes that it is "Info" only, and lists the "witnesses" as "Stringfield and others." This is a reference to some of the work done by Leonard Stringfield, who reported on a wide variety of UFO incidents during his long and distinguished career.

THE F-94C AND THE C-47

According to the "Summary of Circumstances" that was filed with Project Blue Book, "The F-94C took off at 11:05 AM EST for an operational training mission out of Griffiss Air Force Base, New York, on 2 July 1954. The aircraft was only a few miles out when the Griffiss control tower operator called the pilot to advise that he was being diverted to an active air defense mission. A vector of 60 degrees and 10,000 feet altitude was given to intercept an unidentified aircraft. The pilot experienced some difficulty finding this aircraft and the controller then informed him of a second unidentified aircraft in the area. This aircraft was [subsequently] identified [by the pilot] as an Air Force C-47, tail number 6099. At this time there were no indications of F-94 malfunctions as stated by the pilot and the C-47 pilot."

What this tells us is that an unidentified object was identified as a C-47. The F-94C was not, in fact, scrambled to intercept a UFO, but was already airborne when diverted to an active, meaning real, air defense intercept mission. However, it is true that the aircraft was asked to identify an unknown target, which in layman's terms is a UFO.

Once the C-47 was identified, "The ground controller gave the F-94C pilot a heading of 240 degrees as a vector back to the first unidentified aircraft. The F-94C was at 8,000 feet, flying above the tops of broken clouds. The unidentified aircraft was not found above the clouds, so the pilot started to descend below the clouds. It was evident that the unidentified aircraft was going to Griffiss Air Force Base. During the descent there was intense heat in the cockpit and the engine plenum chamber fire warning light came on. The pilot shut down the engine and the light remained on. Due to the critical low altitude and the fire warning, the pilot and radar observer ejected and were recovered without injury."

Clearly, this demonstrates that the other UFO, the one the pilot couldn't find at first, was now in the traffic pattern at Griffiss. The identity, though not established by the pilot, was established by the tower crew and the mission had ended. The UFOs were both military aircraft of some type.

The other point that needs to be made here is that there was not a dense cloud cover. The term "broken clouds" relates to the portion of the sky that is obscured by clouds. It means that there was some cloud cover, but that it did not obscure all the sky, and given various altitudes for those clouds, could have meant that from the cockpit, little of the sky was hidden.



UPSTATE AIR DISASTER: Remains of rocket-carrying Air Force F-94C Starfire jet that crashed yesterday on the outskirts of Walesville, eleven miles southwest of Utica. Four persons were killed and two houses and a car destroyed. One house still burns as police guard scene for official investigators.

The remains of the F-94C jet near Walesville. Smoke from the burning house (upper right in the photo) can still be seen. On the right, the balloon story later in the day.

The report finished, "The aircraft traveled about four miles from the point of ejection and, while on a heading of 199 degrees, crashed into the Walesville intersection at 11:27 AM EST. The aircraft struck a dwelling, killing a housewife and injuring her daughter, then struck an auto at an intersection, killing all three occupants."

The Air Force report suggests nothing about the aircraft being scrambled, a disc-shaped UFO, or a heat ray, as alleged by some UFO writers. There is, in fact, no reason to suggest that this case has anything to do with UFOs, other than an assumption made by Keyhoe a number of years ago.

The Air Force conducted an investigation into the accident, but this report was sealed for many years. Given that the Air Force-sponsored University of Colorado study had access to many official documents, it may not be surprising that they did not create a UFO file for this incident because no UFO was involved.

Nevertheless, even if no UFO was involved, there is the question of what caused the heat in the cockpit. Was there a fire on the F-94, and if so, what caused it? Was the malfunction of the aircraft in any way mysterious?

Until recently, these questions could not be answered definitively because the accident report was still in the government archives. But upon request of Jan Aldrich, a tireless gather of government UFO documents, the report was declassified and released. The general details of the accident are basically the same as reported by Keyhoe and others. But the key finding of the accident investigation is in paragraph 3 of the summary statement:

Investigation revealed the primary cause of the accident to be a malfunction of the aircraft fire detector circuit. The cause for the malfunction could not be determined.

'BALLOON' EXCITES UTICA

Silvery Object Sighted in Sky
—Calls Jam Switchboards.

UTICA, N. Y., July 2 (AP)—A silvery, balloon-like object floating high over the Utica area tonight sent residents rushing to their telephones to make inquiries of newspapers, police and radio stations.

The Utica Press estimated that more than 1,000 called about the object had jammed its switchboard between 8 and 10 P. M. It was reported sighted by residents in a twenty-five-mile radius extending from Rome on the west to Frankfort, east of Utica.

Col. Milton F. Sumnerfelt, commandant of the Air Force Detachment at Rome, said the object appeared to be a plastic balloon about forty feet long and partially deflated. He theorized that it was making a gradual descent and said that if it still were in the area tomorrow morning a plane would be sent to investigate.

A Mohawk Airlines pilot estimated the altitude of the object at about 20,000 feet. He said he saw a light apparently coming from it.

MyTerry 1954

The pilot's decision to abandon the aircraft was consistent with the emergency instructions contained in the F-94C Flight Handbook.

A thorough examination of the plane's air conditioning and pressurization system indicated no evidence of smoke, fuel, or oil, which would have been generated by a fire. The pilot had flown the aircraft on a previous flight that same day and had found it necessary to adjust the cockpit temperature manually several times. The air vents were set so that pressurized air was being directed into the cockpit, with the larger vents forward of the pilot's seat.

The report suggests that "Inasmuch as the pilot acknowledged changing engine power settings and flight altitude during his attempted second interception, it appears that the pilot interpreted a normal, non-automatically controlled temperature rise as an overheat cockpit condition. Since there was no evidence of inflight fire, the fire warning indication received by the pilot was probably due to a malfunction of the fire warning circuit." This accident then became a terrible bit of bad luck, as the malfunctioning fire warning occurred just as the cockpit was being heated from normal aircraft operations. Following procedures, after the warning continued, the pilot shut down the engines and he and his observer bailed out, leaving the pilotless plane to crash in Walesville. As a relevant aside, another conclusion of the report was that the Air Force's inspection requirements for the F-94C fire and overheat-warning circuits were inadequate.

The accident report was completed on August 17, 1954, before Keyhoe wrote *Flying Saucer Conspiracy*. If he had been given access to the document, or at least was provided with the relevant conclusions by Air Force spokes-

man, the confusion over Walesville may never have occurred. Instead, given the understandable confidentiality requirements of military accident investigations, Keyhoe and other writers were left to theorize about the cause of the heat in the cockpit and the crash.

In any event the Walesville case, like that of the death of Thomas Mantell in 1948 chasing a large balloon, should be removed from the UFO files. There was no UFO involvement in the tragedy. ♦

KEYHOE'S CONTEXT

BY FRANK J. REID

Donald E. Keyhoe *always* believed the Walesville incident was a true UFO-effects case, and an important one. In his very last work on UFOs, "Behind the UFO Secrecy," in the *1978 MUFON UFO Symposium Proceedings*, pp. 122-131, he stated, "The true story is still hidden by the AF, marked 'Secret.'"

Was Keyhoe simply stubbornly and irrationally unconvinced by the facts? Or can we make enough of an argument for Keyhoe's case to see why he was so persistent?

Walesville was treated as a true UFO case by the following persons:

(1) The British press treated it as a UFO case, and this was picked up by Waveney Girvan in his book *Flying Saucers and Common Sense* (1955) and Derek Dempster in the first issue of *Flying Saucer Review* ("Space Heated Cockpits," Spring 1955, p. 5). Girvan was an advocate of George Adamski and, as an executive for Werner Laurie, had published Desmond Leslie and Adamski's *Flying Saucers Have Landed* in 1953. Dempster, in *FSR*, briefly compared the case to a 1954 UFO pursuit by a French test pilot, broken off because "heat built up in the cockpit." Thereafter, Walesville was essentially forgotten in *FSR*.

(2) Leonard Stringfield wrote up the case for the October 1, 1954, issue of his *C.R.I.F.O. Newsletter*, but (perhaps pointedly) did not return to it in his books *Inside Saucer Post . . . 3-0 Blue* (1957) and *Situation Red: The UFO Siege!* (1977). Frank Edwards included it in *Flying Saucers—Serious Business* (1966), which saw many reprintings—but Edwards was so unreliable when he wrote books that we can't be exactly sure what his confidential source told him. Keyhoe, Stringfield, and Edwards all had in common a curious relationship with the Air Force, a belief in the extraterrestrial hypothesis, a belief in more government cover-up than foul-up, and anxiety over any indication of hostile alien intent.¹

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Abandoned Jet Kills 3 in Car, 1 in House

By The Associated Press
UTICA, N. Y., July 2.—A jet fighter plane returning from a quick "scramble" to investigate an unidentified plane, later reported to be "friendly," crashed in flames in a crossroads battle today.

Four persons on the ground were killed and two houses and an automobile were destroyed.

The two Air Force lieutenants in the F84-C Starfire, which carried forty-eight high-powered two-and-one-half inch rockets, battled out before it plunged into tiny Walesville, eleven miles southwest of Utica, about 12:30 P. M.

The two who escaped injury, Wepa Lieut. William E. Atkins, 24 years old, of Dulton, Va., the pilot, and Lieut. Henry F. Condon, 26, of Perryville, Md., radar observer.

Those killed were Stanley Phillips, 28, his wife, Florence, 32, and their son, Gary, 11, all of neighboring Hecla, and Mrs. Doris Monroe, 28, occupant of one of the houses. The Phillips family was in the automobile. Mrs. Monroe was in her home preparing lunch for her four children when the plane crashed.

Two Jets Ordered Up

The plane was attached to the Twenty-seventh Fighter Interceptor Squadron at near-by Griffiss Air Force Base, Rome.

The base said it was one of two planes ordered up on a practice scramble that turned into an actual mission. The public information officer, Maj. Evelyn Watkins, explained that the two planes were barely airborne on the training mission when they received radioed orders to check on an unidentified plane in the area.

Major Watkins said no information was available on the unidentified plane or where it was located by the jets.

In Washington, a Pentagon spokesman said the plane was about seventy-five miles northeast of Rome, on the edge of the base covered by Griffiss, when it was detected.

"Scramble" is the term pilots apply to emergency flights.

A Griffiss spokesman said the pilots had been satisfied that the plane had been "friendly" and were headed back to the base when fire broke out in the cockpit of one jet.

The air base said the pilot and radar observer had stayed with the plane until the "last minute." A spokesman quoted Lieutenant Atkins as reporting that he had ordered Lieutenant Condon to bail out, then had jumped himself from about 7,000 feet.

Griffiss officials said that fuel in the burning plane apparently had exploded when the jet crashed. They said it had not been determined whether an explosion occurred while the jet was in the air.

Earlier, an Air Force officer had said there "must have been an explosion."

(3) Jacques Vallee, whose use of the case as litmus for Edward Condon I will cover below.

(4) Keyhoe's NICAP proteges Richard Hall and Gordon Lore, who cited the case along with other UFO-effects cases.²

(5) Other writers who calmly (like Margaret Sachs) or feverishly (like Otto Binder) rewrote what Keyhoe said.³

For Jacques Vallee, Walesville was a UFO-effects case as well as an index of the sincerity of Edward U. Condon and the 1966-1969 Colorado University UFO study:

Well, I had obtained their [the pilot's and radar man's] names and phone numbers and I gave that to Condon in 1966. It was the first thing I gave to Condon,

telling him: "You have the authority, you can pick up this phone and call those guys. Here are their phone numbers, here is a perfect case for physical evidence." He never did it. . . . You see, that to me was the test. If the University of Colorado really meant business, if

Plane Strikes Tree

The unoccupied plane struck a large elm tree back of the Walesville general store. A section of the burning craft, probably a wing, struck the car carrying the Phillips family home, presumably from the Rome State School where both husband and wife were employed as occupational instructors.

The sedan burst into flames, plowed into the home of Mrs. Mary Peck, 79, and set the colonial frame structure afire. Mrs. Peck fled to safety.

Meanwhile, the body of the plane plunged through the roof of the one-story Monroe home and fire quickly destroyed it.

Mrs. Monroe was preparing lunch while her children played outside. Her husband, Elroy, was at work in a foundry.

One of the children, Betty Lon, 1, suffered a severe laceration of the leg, presumably when struck by debris from the shattered plane, parts of which were scattered all over the community. The three other Monroe children escaped without a scratch. They were Kenneth, 8; Buddy, 6, and Nora May, 3.

Heat Melts Road

The plane's engine was found about 200 feet south of the four corners. Heat from the flames was so intense it melted the macadam road.

Orson Buck, whose daughter operates the general store, said he saw the plane strike and Betty Lou Monroe fall. He pulled the child away from the house and took her to the store. She later was taken to a Utica hospital.

Kenneth Monroe, told investigators that he and his sisters and brother had been playing in the yard when "all of a sudden there was smoke and fire and I heard my mother screaming."

He said he had taken his sisters by the hand and half-dragged them to the front of the general store. He said his brother had run along with them.

The pilot and the radar observers were found a relatively short distance apart and a few miles from the crash scene. They were taken to the air base hospital, where examination disclosed they had escaped injury.

The air base public information office said that a board of

inquiry had begun an investigation.

In Washington, the Air Force said a three-man team had been ordered to the scene to investigate.

One Rocket Missing

UTICA, N. Y., July 2 (UP)—Air Force officials in Washington said the cockpit of the plane that crashed had become unaccountably hot during the flight and its abandonment had followed.

After the crash, one rocket carried by the plane was reported unaccounted for and authorities feared someone in the hundreds of persons that gathered at the scene had taken it.

Later, an Air Force spokesman in Washington said the intercepted plane probably was one that had failed to file a flight plan with the Civil Aeronautics Administration or one that had drifted off its announced flight path.

The two Starfires were sent up to check it after it was discovered on a radar screen, he said.

Condon really wanted to know, he would have picked up that phone. All he had to do was dial two numbers.⁴

Walesville *is* in the Condon Report, as Case 19-B of Gordon D. Thayer's chapter, "Optical and Radar Analyses of Field Cases."⁵ Thayer separates it into a July 1 balloon and a July 2 intercept of an ordinary aircraft. His chapter heading, however, is a bit misleading. Writing to Stanton T. Friedman in 1975, Thayer explained:

In the original Condon Report chapter, I had all of six weeks to get all my material together, do the analyses, and write up the results. Admittedly, I made a few mistakes, and there was a lot of information not at my disposal (many of the Condon Blue Book files were incomplete as I found on comparing them with McDonald's copies—strange isn't it?), but I still feel I did a reasonable job under the circumstances. This is a point that McDonald did not appreciate, because he didn't know about it until Jan. 1970. You can see why I did not interview anyone "in the field."⁶

This doesn't mean Walesville was one of the Condon cases where interviewing participants would have made for a different conclusion. It's even possible Condon made the calls, and somehow *forgot* to crow over it in his summary. Still, we might keep in mind that Thayer didn't interview, even if he knew the phone numbers were available.

To understand Keyhoe's case, we must know its larger context. For a little over five months—from August 1952 through February 1953—a narrow window opened into Project Blue Book, the USAF investigation of UFOs. According to Dewey J. Fournet Jr., an Air Force major assigned as Pentagon liaison to Blue Book, "The entire press had the privilege of requesting this [UFO] info: Don Keyhoe happened to be one who found out quickly about this [new] policy and took maximum advantage of it."⁷

But Keyhoe does seem to have been more equal than the others. He could request categories of cases (radar and radar-visuals, mother ships, etc.). Especially good cases were volunteered to him. After earlier being steered towards a radar expert who Keyhoe was warned would be uncommunicative about flying saucers, he was allowed to interview an expert who debunked the official "temperature inversion" explanation of the Washington D.C. radar-visuals of July 1952. He was told this was all cleared by General Samford, who had proffered the explanation at a massive national press conference to cool down the media flap. And he was given a manuscript (apparently for transmission to *True* magazine) by an Air Force Intelligence officer, Col. W. C. Odell, on the possible mass emigration of humanity from a future dying Earth—which also said things like, "Granted that superintelligents in another solar system are looking for a suitable planet for a second home, why would earth be singled out?"⁸

Perhaps oddest of all: Keyhoe was definitely told that Capt. Edward J. Ruppelt, head of Blue Book, was "going to

recommend that you go on active duty with the Project, for a couple of weeks anyway. You'd be able to see everything in their files, and it would save time clearing reports." This was from Public Information Officer Al Chop in late January 1953, before the Robertson Panel policy change, of which Keyhoe had heard only vague scuttlebutt, kicked in.

Keyhoe was a major in the United States Marine Corps, retired—and a few pen strokes would put him back on active duty. He had several times offered to go back on active duty, so that under military security regulations he could be given reason to lay off the UFO subject, if there *was* a good reason.⁹ No wonder Keyhoe thought he was being used by a faction in the Air Force (and perhaps among higher policymakers) to prepare the public for a tremendous announcement. And that—after Blue Book went into post-Robertson, close-mouthed debunking mode—blind skeptics and a "silence group" had won control over the truth.

What is not appreciated is that Keyhoe had served in this role before!

In the years between the world wars, an international peace movement grew up. Though it was ruthlessly manipulated by both Communists and Nazis for their own ends, it was rooted in genuine disillusion about World War I, and in dread that another such war would exhaust and destroy western civilization. After another European war started in August 1939, these sentiments had a last flareup in the American anti-interventionist movement—called isolationists by their critics.¹⁰

Unlike his old pal Charles A. Lindbergh (a leader of America First), Donald E. Keyhoe was an interventionist, at least by recognizing America's inevitable involvement. He wrote alarmist articles about foreign espionage, and in 1940 his book *M-Day: If War Comes, What Your Government Plans for You*—excerpted in the big, mass-circulation *American Magazine* for December 1939—laid out the official plans for the domestic controls to be imposed after "Mobilization Day." (That they *were* the official plans is shown by the way most of it happened as Keyhoe said it would, but with more carrot and less stick. Some of that was due to not needing to put "more than 500,000 hostile aliens and disloyal citizens" into concentration camps in the first year of war. In June 1941 Hitler invaded his ally the USSR, and thus Communists worked for, not against, the war.)¹¹

As Donald E. Keyhoe did his war work back on active duty with the Naval Aviation Training Division, he must have felt that he'd contributed as much as one man could to preparing the American people for wartime. And a decade later, he must have wondered: What went wrong? What exactly reversed, in preparing them for UFO reality? And why?

The problem became acute when *Flying Saucers from Outer Space* was published in 1953, and Keyhoe found himself dueling with spin and dirty tricks. Just one example: In September 1953, big, mass-circulation *Look* magazine,

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