

**Keith Chester,
the author of a
groundbreaking
new book**

Strange Company: Military Encounters with UFOs in World War II

by Nick Redfern

Packed with never-before-seen documentation, witness testimony, and reams of new data, Strange Company (Anomalist Press, 2007) is likely to be one of the most talked about UFO books of this year, as this interview graphically reveals.

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Redfern: What is the basic theme of the book?

Chester: *Strange Company* follows the UFO phenomenon as it existed during World War II. The story flows chronologically by month and year; as it progresses, readers are introduced to the sightings, both conventional and unconventional, and learn how those sightings were discussed—or not—in Allied intelligence memoranda.

We follow several scientists who were responsible for investigating the aerial phenomena: military commanders who were discussing the sightings and intelligence personnel who interrogated the pilots and wrote the reports. Several intelligence-gathering missions are referenced since they may have served as an important apparatus in obtaining aerial-phenomena information collected by the enemy. I would say that the theme of this period piece is how the UFO phenomenon was dealt with by the Allied powers during a time when mankind was in the throes of the worst global conflict in recorded history.

Redfern: What was it that prompted you to write *Strange Company*?

Chester: In 1989 I began an investigation regarding a witness who claimed she overheard a discussion about a recovered UFO in the possession of the U.S. military.

Interestingly, she heard this conversation during the summer of 1969 while working at the Office Of Civil Defense, located in the Pentagon.

Having been familiar with crash-and-retrieval research published by UFO author and researcher Leonard Stringfield, I decided Stringfield's experience was valuable to my investigation. He agreed to guide me through my interview, and in the process became a mentor of sorts.

Over the next couple of months, Len and I became good friends, often discussing many aspects of the UFO phenomenon. We eventually discussed his 1945 foo-fighter observation while flying over the Pacific, occurring just days after the war had ended. At that time, I knew I'd eventually want to explore his fascinating sighting because it predated the summer of 1947 when the flying-saucer stories took the world by storm.

On February 11, 1991 I conducted an interview with Len specifically surrounding his sighting, and on this date I knew I wanted to someday write a book about his experience. That interview was slotted as the first of several. I planned to follow-up each time with more detailed questions. Unfortunately I was much too slow and missed my opportunity because Len passed away in 1994.

Redfern: How much time was spent in government

archives? And of the material that you found in the archives, how much was previously unseen?

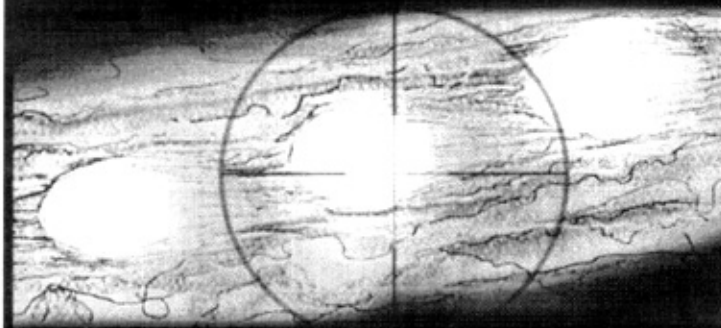
Chester: When I decided to write *Strange Company*, I knew I had to devote a good deal of time to serious research in order to accomplish anything of significance. Going in, I understood that I would not find anything among the core documents of UFO material gleaned from the United States Air Force Project Blue Book files. The problem was the files contained information from 1947 onwards. Your question regards archives, but unfortunately I delegated my time to only one facility: the National Archives at Maryland.

The amount of documentation there is immense in scope. The challenge was that many organizations, both military and civilian, potentially hold documentation regarding the phenomenon, but since the terminology used to describe the phenomenon was different back then, it was—and is—difficult finding where and how the material was filed within the record groups.

Anyway, getting back to your specific question, I felt it was important to conduct a concentrated effort at one place. This allowed me the opportunity to get familiar with the facility and staff; beneficial for a more thorough search effort. I spent close to four years, 1999–2003, of monthly visits, sometimes five times a month) at the College Park facility. As a result I believe a good 95 percent of the material I found has never been seen before, especially the foo-fighter documents.

Redfern: Everyone in the UFO field has heard of the foo fighters, but your book discusses various other forms of UFO seen during World War II. Please outline the basic types of UFO seen during the war: shape, color, size, and location.

KEITH CHESTER



STRANGE COMPANY

MILITARY ENCOUNTERS WITH UFOs IN WWII

Chester: One of the misconceptions in the post-war UFO literature is that all the wartime sightings were called the foo fighters. That is why in *Strange Company* I briefly discuss the Scandinavian sightings that occurred a few years prior to 1939. These sightings were significant in that they revealed a trend that continues to this day. Various colored lights were observed in the sky and were reported sporting different shapes: rectangular, circular, and round.

During the war, names were given to the sightings, such as the *light*, the *thing*, *balls of fire*, and of course *foo fighters*. In some cases a distinct solid object was described, but most instances report some form of light as being the one and only feature. Shapes varied, but the majority of the objects or aircraft were

circular, spherical, or disc-shaped in design.

Regarding the location of sightings, I believe that the UFOs were seen around the world in considerable number, but most of the sightings mentioned in *Strange Company* were over the Italian, European, and Pacific theaters of operation. While my book is heavy with European sightings, I include sightings seen over Australia, Canada, England, Russia, and the United States; and I think one over Japan and Germany. So I'd have to say that stating the sightings were primarily concentrated in one geographical region is inaccurate at this stage of research.

Redfern: Were there official investigations of UFOs in World War II along the lines of the U.S. Air Force's Project Blue Book? Or was it a case of the agencies just logging the reports and filing them away because they didn't know what to do with them?

Chester: Here's where I believe *Strange Company* of-

fers new insight. Up until now the general consensus is that no war-time UFO investigation took place. The primary reason for this assumption is that there was not enough man-power and time to waste pursuing an aerial phenomenon. There was a brutal war occurring on an unprecedented scale. How could the Allies devote resources to such an topic when there were so many pertinent issues at hand?

This logic is sound, but it has always been challenged by UFO researchers—as early as the 1950s. I personally believe the phenomenon represented an incredible threat to the Allied governments. As the reader progresses through *Strange Company*, it will become clear that the unknown aerial reports caused much concern in Allied air intelligence circles. This is a key point.

It needs to be remembered that the Allies were very aware that much was not known about Germany's technological advances. The U.S. government was completely paranoid that Hitler had an atomic bomb. It was something that could not be ignored. And it wasn't.

Arguably the most important intelligence gathering operation of the war, once we got into Italy, was the ALSOS mission. This mission was charged with finding evidence that Germany had an atomic bomb. The ALSOS mission was charged with carrying out a critical investigation, one that President Roosevelt knew must succeed, and quickly. For this reason alone, I feel the ALSOS mission was an influencing factor that caused the U.S. to ponder many scenarios, including the unconventional aircraft sightings.

This is why I feel there was a great deal of attention placed on the phenomena sightings. When Allied airmen reported observing unusual, highly advanced, and unidentified aircraft, it didn't take much to understand the potential disaster. What if Germany had designed an operable aircraft that defied known aerodynamic principles and this aircraft could deliver an atomic bomb anywhere in the world?

So yes, I feel the degree of interest in the UFO sightings was far greater than has been suspected. And this is why I think it was warranted to aggressively monitor the phenomenon, utilizing military units, civilian organizations, and key scientists and engineers. It can be further reasoned that the wartime investigations were continued without a break, including U.S. Air Force personnel assigned to investigate flying saucers under the code names we know exist starting in the late 1940s: Projects Saucer, Sign, Grudge, and Blue Book.

The code names we know exist starting in the late 1940s: Projects Saucer, Sign, Grudge, and Blue Book.

Redfern: Were any conclusions reached by the authorities?

Chester: My research has fallen short regarding any conclusions reached by investigations of the foo fighters or other unconventional aircraft during the war. The closest we have to a conclusion is located in a U.S. Central Intelligence Agency document: the Robertson Panel/Durant Report. Hosted by the CIA, a panel of esteemed scientists met in January 1953 to review the best UFO evidence and determine whether the UFOs posed a national security threat.

In that report it briefly mentioned that the foo fighters were deemed nothing more than misidentified sightings of St. Elmo's fire or other natural phenomena. But the key point made within the Robertson Panel report is that "their [foo fighters] exact cause or nature was never defined." This was written eight years after the war.

Importantly, it was Dr. Howard P. Robertson who chaired the CIA panel of eminent scientists and the same Howard Robertson who was appointed to head the foo-fighter investigation as part of General Eisenhower's Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force's (SHAEP) Scientific Intelligence Advisory Section.

Redfern: For you personally, what were four or five of the most impressive reports that you found?

Chester: I have to admit that many of the more extraordinary UFO sighting accounts were located by other researchers. It was these sightings that helped inspire me to continue plowing through the endless files at the National Archives.

While I found very little during the 1942 and 1943 period, I did find material in the 1944 period. One of the most intriguing sightings occurred in March 1944. A "silver, cigar-shaped object like an airship" was seen crossing a bomber's path, approximately 2- to 3-thousand feet away, and the crew felt they could see "windows along the bottom of the object."

The key words in the document were *like an airship*. It seems that identifying a dirigible only a couple thousand feet away would not be too difficult. That sighting was listed in a memorandum discussing "Light and other Defensive Phenomena."

Of all the memoranda I located, I would have to say that the early 1945 exchanges between the 415th Night Fighter Squadron, XII Tactical Air Force, and the First

PRODUCED AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

**AIR STAFF
SUPREME HEADQUARTERS
ALLIED EXTRAORDINARY FORCE.**

SECRET

11 February 1945.

REF: SHAFF AHP/78.5755/A-2.

SUBJECT: Night phenomena.

TO: Headquarters, U.S.S.T.A.F.
(For attention of Chief Technical Intelligence
Officer, Col. Bradley).

1. Attached are copies of reports received from the First Tactical Air Force (Prov). From the number of reports quoted in the 2nd W/Ind from the 415th Night Fighter Squadron, it would seem that there must be something more than mere imagination behind the matter, and in view of the fact that pilots and crews are becoming slightly worried by them, it is considered that everything possible should be done to get to the root of the matter.
2. Copies of the reports have been sent to the Air Ministry for their consideration, and the Scientific Investigation Division of this Headquarters (Mr. Robertson) has also been asked to consider the problem.
3. In the meantime, it is suggested that it might be as well for an Air Technical Intelligence officer to visit the Unit concerned and obtain reports and impressions at first hand from aircrew personnel.

For the Deputy Supreme Commander,

C.M. GIBSON
C.M. GIBSON
Air Commodore.
A.C. of S., A-2,
Air Staff, SHAFF.

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Tactical Air Force (Provisional) were the most impressive for several reasons. For one, it is the first set of documents that confirm that confusion reigned over the foo-fighter phenomenon. Those exchanges also included a response from the British Air Ministry indicating that Royal Air Force Bomber Command crews had "for some time been reporting similar phenomena."

It was further stated: "The whole affair is still something of a mystery, and the evidence is very sketchy and varied so that no definite and satisfactory explanation can yet be given." Later, SHAEF's Air staff reported to the First Tactical Air Force (Provisional) that flak rockets and the German Me-262 were likely

responsible, but SHAEF also regretted not being able to provide any kind of satisfactory explanation.

It was in one of these exchanges that Dr. Robertson was requested to investigate the foo fighters. In the Pacific theater of operation, another impressive report offered a very brief description about the "balls of fire" sightings over Japan. This small memo was part of General Arnold's—Commanding General of the entire U.S. Army Air Forces—daily intelligence briefing.

Penciled in on the side of the page was "Intelligence to obtain Dr. Von Karman, Dr. Bush, and any other worthwhile view." This is pretty significant because Dr. Vannevar Bush was President Roosevelt's and Truman's scientific adviser. Dr. Von Karman was one of the U.S. top theoretical physicists regarding aerodynamics. Why would General Arnold need to reach outside his extensive Air Technical Intelligence apparatus to query his top scientists for something as simple as anti-aircraft rockets?

Redfern: How did the media treat the reports back then?

Chester: It was not until January 1945 that coverage of the phenomenon became large enough to attract the attention of large newspapers and

magazines like *Time* and *Newsweek*. This media blitz was in response to the foo-fighter sightings.

Most of the foo-fighter coverage relayed stories of sightings reported by American night-fighter crews, primarily with the 415th Night Fighter Squadron. In fact, it was members of the 415th who named the strange objects *foo fighters*, and for the next couple of months the foo fighters took center stage.

This couple-month rash of media reporting cemented the name foo fighters in the public's mind. As a result, the foo fighters became the pet name used as the catch-all term to describe the wartime sighting that still continues today.

Getting back to the war, the media coverage was

pulsating with an array of theories trying to explain what the pilots were seeing. Everything from enemy gun-ranging devices to ball lightning was explored as a possible explanation.

In many cases the press reports incensed the pilots because the theories made them feel like fools. The pilots knew the difference between a meteor streaking in the heavens, a flare, and St. Elmo's fire.

The pilots were trained observers who had exceptional sight and took pride in their observational skills. I learned during my contact with a few of the veterans that they were not happy with how the press treated their sightings; they actually considered some of the coverage as a personal attack on their integrity.

Redfern: Was there a reluctance on the part of air crews to report sightings back then? Or was there no UFO stigma/ridicule factor at that time?

Chester: Oh yes, there was a great deal of disbelief by those who were not witnesses. But aside from the airmen's disgust with the media's handling of their sightings, they were far more disappointed and surprised with the attitudes of the intelligence men (S-

more than one crew observed the same object during a mission.

Redfern: Do you feel that authorities knew that these things were not Allied or Axis in origin and deliberately covered up evidence of alien activity? Or were both sides just baffled by the data?

Chester: That's one of the questions I had asked myself every time I added another astonishing sighting account to my data base. It is very plausible to suggest that Allied command had uncovered evidence of alien activity, and they were keeping it under wraps. But if true, we have to assume that once the war began, if the Allied or Axis nations had any information regarding alien visitation, it was definitely being kept secret beyond the level of the atomic-bomb information. Many skeptics will scoff at this position.

I'm not saying it happened; although, why not? There is no reason not to explore such possibilities. To continue: Information so far indicates that during the war's early years, Allied air commands were simply regarding the reported phenomena as misidentified enemy aircraft or antiaircraft weaponry. By late

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2s) who were responsible for interviewing the crews about the mission.

In most cases the intelligence men ridiculed the crews, made fun of their stories, and even thought the crews were drinking. This attitude was in turn causing the airmen to remain quiet, keeping the more bizarre sightings to themselves; this issue alone represents a problem with many sightings not being documented through official channels. It should be remembered that many pilots feared being grounded for physical or psychological health reasons.

As the war progressed, unit commanders likely realized that it was counterproductive and too dangerous to ignore possible enemy advancements. As reports began to mount, I feel the squadron-level air-intelligence personnel were instructed to encourage the crews to provide every possible detail of their sighting. Furthermore, despite whatever mandate the unit-level air intelligence were following, I think they were personally becoming more apt to believe something weird was observed by the crews, especially when

1944, with combined information provided by many intelligence gathering operations, numerous sighting reports, captured scientists, engineers, and military personnel, and the recapturing of Nazi occupied territory, I believe the authorities were starting to look for answers elsewhere.

It must be pointed out that jet-propelled aircraft and rockets were already on the scene, and it did not take long for the Allied commands to identify and deal with that threat. In reality, Allied military command felt Nazi jets had entered the conflict much too late to be an effective deterrent.

Hitler's resources were becoming smaller by the month. We were destroying Germany's industrial facilities much quicker than they could recover. We were beating the German war machine down, but Hitler still had a sizable army, one that could throw a curve ball.

Many people believe that curve ball was secret technology that explained the foo fighters. But how can the earlier UFO sightings, prior to 1944, be explained? It's my understanding that the German rocket program

was not that advanced until 1944. The same goes for the Japanese war machine. They, too, had tricks up their sleeves. They also had quite the technology exchange with Germany.

But the unconventional aircraft phenomenon was occurring over the Pacific areas as it was over Europe: strange sightings among conventional weaponry. The fact was that Allied air forces dominated the skies. By the time Japan had surrendered in mid-1945, there was no reason for reports of any unknown aerial activity. As the closing months of the war neared, I think the Allied staff was just as baffled as they were when the Pacific campaign started.

Then there was Len Stringfield's sighting after Japan's capitulation. Conservatively speaking, I think that during the war all countries around the globe had their own level of awareness regarding unusual highly sophisticated aircraft—otherwise known as the UFO phenomenon.

Redfern: What was the most surprising thing that you found?

Chester: During my research effort, I'd have to say that what surprised me most was actually locating *any* material. I had my doubts, only because it's been six decades since the war ended, and a book on the war had not been written. I thought maybe researchers before me had thoroughly combed the records.

But I was wrong, and I did uncover bits and pieces that confirmed there was a real wartime UFO phenomenon that perplexed the Allied commands right up through the end of the conflict. Of that material, my favorite was when I located reference to a "Spec. Binder" dealing with "phenomena" related sightings that was being kept by the U.S. War Department.

Though I only found a few examples of weaponry related phenomena, such as flares and rockets, designated for filing in the "Spec. Binder", the importance of the "Spec. Binder" discovery, for me, was reading between the lines. The Spec. Binder reinforced the likelihood of at least one high-level aerial phenomena investigation prior to those initiated during early 1945 in response to the foo fighter sightings.

Since the Spec. Binder shows that time and effort was delegated to phenomena sightings, it can be proposed that other Spec. Binders exist, and they may

SECRET

A. Cmdr. Grierson
A.C. of S. A-2
Air Staff S.H.A. (621)

Proj : Air Ministry, D.D. 112.

Date : 13th March 1945

Ref : 111/45/DP13 15 MAR 1945

6C A 37163

BALES OF FIRE - RED.

The papers dealing with the above subject which you enclosed with your memo SHARP Air/T8.37158/A2 dated 11th February, have been carefully examined and discussed with the various other Departments concerned.

Bomber Command crews have for some time been reporting similar phenomena. A few of the alleged aircraft may have been Me. 262 and for the rest, flak rockets are suggested as the most likely explanation.

The whole affair is still something of a mystery and the evidence is very sketchy and varied so that no definite and satisfactory explanation can yet be given.

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E. D. M. Hopkins
Group Captain

contain highly exotic information. This is why I feel there is much more documentation awaiting discovery.

I also found reason to suggest that document sanitation was occurring. One example regards a sighting that was discovered by British researchers Andy Roberts and David Clarke. It occurred on May 27-28, 1943 over Essen, Germany. According to co-pilot Sergeant Gordon Cockcroft, he and his pilot encountered a large "cylindrical" object, suspended in the air as his bomber passed by.

The crew could see portholes lining

the side of the "silvery-gold" aircraft. Suddenly the object climbed at an incredible rate of speed, estimated at several thousand miles per hour, until it was out of sight.

Once back at base the crew was debriefed as usual. Oddly, the air intelligence men acted as if the crew's report was not sensational at all. I located a British Flak Liaison Officer report describing the above mission, and there was no mention of the incredible sighting. Can we ignore their testimony? Can we call them liars? I don't think so.

I also located military documentation verifying an actual foo-fighter investigation, the one headed by Dr. Howard P. Robertson. Since I had no illusions I'd find a wealth of material, I still felt it was possible, and that thought kept me motivated.

Many months would pass before I found anything even remotely close to the subject. It is necessary that I explain to the reader that very little wartime military or government UFO-type documentation has been re-

covered. While *Strange Company* is full of new documentation, it's really quite a small amount in comparison to what I believe should exist.

Redfern: What sorts of records did you find in the archives? Was it just raw data, or detailed studies, or a combination of both?

Chester: I located mission reports and intelligence memoranda. My four-year search at the archives involved me reviewing a huge amount of material that had no connection with UFOs. For one, that term did not exist. In fact, my real challenge was reading the documents and determining whether the person writing the report was using catch-all terms like flares, jets, and rockets to discuss a sighting that in actuality was something far more extraordinary.

It should be pointed out that despite the concentrated efforts by UFO researchers studying the Project Bluebook files, it's my understanding that there are still missing documents. This is known because of references in one report of another report, and that report can't be located. So in this regard, I feel *Strange Company* has only scratched the surface of World War II UFO records awaiting discovery.

Redfern: Talk a bit more about the investigations that went on.

Chester: We now know through official documentation that the British and Americans were conducting investigations. In *Strange Company*, three men are introduced who were actively involved with those investigations.

Earlier, I mentioned that Dr. Howard P. Robertson coordinated the foo-fighter investigation out of SHAEF. An intelligence office out of General Spaatz's First Tactical Air Force (Provisional) was also requested to report to the 415th Night Fighter Squadron in response to the uproar over the foo-fighter sightings.

I point out that this suggests there were possibly two separate investigations in place: one with SHAEF and one with the First Tactical Air Force. And according to the 1953 Robertson Panel report, there were two other scientists involved with investigating the foo fighters: Dr. David T. Griggs and Dr. Luis Alvarez. Both men were radar experts.

Griggs worked out of the War Department as a scientific adviser and Alvarez was involved to some capacity with the atomic-bomb project. But it was Griggs, who was cited in the Robertson Panel report as being the "most knowledgeable" person regarding the foo fighters. He is on record as saying he wrote reports, but of course, these reports have never been located. His report was one of the prime targets of my investigation.

When it comes to the investigations conducted by Germany, Italy, and Japan, we are lacking official documentation that verifies claims of such investigations. Stories of enemy pilots seeing UFO activity exist. I have one example in my book that veteran Warren Barber told me about. He said that after the war he attended a conference and the speaker was an ex-intelligence officer with the Army Air Force who had interviewed German pilots who reported seeing the foo fighters.

Barber, who had a sighting of his own, was told that a British crew saw the same thing he did that night. In my mind, there is no doubt that the Axis powers were conducting unconventional aircraft investigations of their own.

Information surrounding an Italian investigation starting in the early 1930s has surfaced in recent years. This information, I believe, is still being investigated. Until we orchestrate intensive coordinated investigations in archives around the world, I feel this question will remain unanswered for some time. I say *coordinated* because I'm not sure how much progress the researchers in Germany, Italy, and Japan have made regarding uncovering documentation detailing official wartime investigations.

Besides the Italian documents released in recent years concerning Italy's wartime involvement with the UFO phenomenon beginning in the early 1930s, if other foreign official records exist, they have not been made available for general public consumption. I am very aware that my research effort falls short with this matter, and I need to explore it further.

Redfern: Were you surprised at how much material you uncovered that had been either overlooked or not found before?

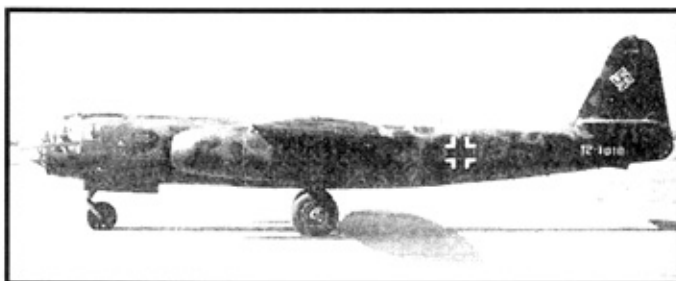
The crew could see portholes lining the side of the "silvery-gold" aircraft. Suddenly the object climbed at an incredible rate of speed, estimated at several thousand miles per hour, until it was out of sight.

Chester: I'd like to point out that two excellent researcher/historians, Jan Aldrich and Barry Greenwood, were very instrumental with the genesis of my investigation. Another valuable source of information was a paper written by Jeff Lindell, who had conducted research on the subject for his college thesis. These couple of resources helped me determine the clearest picture of what military documentation was available and what was known about the World War II sightings.

Although I had copies of the most pertinent material from their archives, I still hunted down the original documents for myself. I wanted to determine if something was overlooked along the way. Again, remember, the term *foo fighter* was a name given to the objects by the 415th Night Fighter Squadron. Other units were calling these sightings by an assortment of terms including *jets*, *flares*, *lights*, and *balls of fire*.

Another problem with the mission reports is not knowing whether all the sighting information was included. Did the intelligence officer debriefing the crew use the term *jet* or *flare* to describe the sighting in place of describing an unknown light or aircraft that displayed very odd flight and performance characteristics? Eventually, I was surprising myself by the material I was finding. For example, it became apparent that there were far too many sightings of enemy jet-propelled night fighters as per what is known to have existed.

It was also very apparent that most of the mission reports were abbreviated for passing through normal intelligence channels. Anyway, given the amount of documents I reviewed as compared to what exists and has not been checked, I was surprised by the number of documents I uncovered relating to the phenomena sightings.



The First Tactical Air Force (Provisional) thought that flak rockets and the German Me-262 were likely responsible, but SHAEF also regretted not being able to provide any kind of satisfactory explanation.

Redfern: You don't delve into the classic Nazi-saucer angle, or the few reports that exist on alleged crashed UFOs in World War II. Were there specific reasons for that?

Chester: My first couple of drafts of the book included the purported German flying-saucer program and other secret technology. That material alone would double the size of this book. I struggled with this issue for years before deciding to not include the Nazi-saucer aspect of the UFO phenomenon. Currently, there are several books in publication that deal with the German angle more effectively, and they offer tantalizing information that, I feel, can't be totally disregarded.

Interestingly, if one looks at the documentation I gleaned from the National Archives, there is every reason

to think it was German experimental aircraft or weaponry that was reported by the Allied airmen. But when placing that material among the prewar and postwar UFO sightings reported by military personnel and civilians, along with the extraordinary wartime sightings that defy explanation even today, a whole new picture emerges, therefore greatly challenging the idea that UFOs during the war were the result of German advanced-aircraft projects.

Since my book runs chronologically, I think the reader will entertain the German secret-technology aspect as being the culprit of the unconventional sightings, just as the Allied command did. So that's why I took the Nazi UFO material out and primarily focused upon the military sightings and the reaction by the Allied command as it was happening.

I think this is the strength of *Strange Company*, and it's why I

***At the College
Park facility
there are well
over
one hundred
boxes of
World War II
air-intelligence
files that are still
classified.***

feel the book's material will provide a fresh addition to the existing UFO literature. Another area of research of the UFO phenomenon is the so-called crash-and-retrieval element. Some researchers feel several unconventional aircraft were recovered as early as 1941 in the United States and Italy.

This area of research is highly debated. Again, while my ears are not turned off to such discussion, I chose to not include that material and keep my book more focused on the Allied air forces' handling of the phenomenon. It is fun to ponder whether unconventional aircraft not from this earth were shot down.

Redfern: Was there any evidence, strong or weak, to suggest that at least some of the really unexplained wartime UFOs were secret military devices? Or did they all defy explanation?

Chester: The intelligence memoranda I've reviewed reveals an important aspect to this story: There was much confusion among air intelligence personnel regarding the sightings. The reports reflect a real effort on their part in trying to identify the objects. In the Pacific theater, General Lemay's XXI Bomber Command's air intelligence staff worked hard trying to determine what the "balls of fire" and "circles of light" were.

His intelligence staff wrote some of the most comprehensive reports found so far. Their intelligence memoranda cover in detail what they thought the balls of fire represented technologically, in terms of Japanese weapons and aircraft. But again it is worth noting that these same reports are classic examples of the guessing and theorizing conducted by the air-intelligence staff about the observed phenomenon; the key word being *phenomenon*.

When Dr. Griggs was assigned to the Pacific Theater as a scientific adviser to General Kenney, his balls-of-fire investigation proved unsuccessful, even after interrogating Japanese prisoners. As of September 1945, he had found no evidence that all the sightings were Japanese experimental aircraft or anti-aircraft weaponry. And, his Pacific report has never been located. So, in essence, I would have to say that yes, at least some of the officially recorded sightings still defy explanation.

Redfern: Is there any indication of missing files or secret files that you tried to find—or that you learned existed—but that you didn't manage to locate?

Chester: The only indication of missing or secret files are instances where accounts do not match the records. For instance, the 415th NFS belonged to the 64th Fighter Wing, which belonged to the XII Tactical Air Command. Many of the 415th NFS mission reports are abbreviated to the extent that nothing is mentioned about strange sightings in the 64th Fighter Wing reports.

This indicates to me that sighting reports were abbreviated for use in normal intelligence channels, but fuller reports were in the hands of higher-command levels, and these reports were being passed around under the radar. This can be seen when the XII Tactical Air Command requested the

415th NFS to provide a report regarding the foo fighters for review with the XII Tactical Air Command. The 64th Fighter Wing was left out of the loop.

This may seem like a minor detail, but when trying to uncover classified information, little details like this are very important for a researcher who's putting the pieces of a puzzle together. As I mentioned, Dr. Griggs verified that he investigated the foo fighters and the balls of fire.

He said a balls-of-fire report was written, and it can be assumed that since he investigated the foo fighters, a report was written. Griggs did not have a copy as of 1969 and had no idea where it was located.

I'd like to point out that at the College Park facility there are well over one hundred boxes of World War II air-intelligence files that are still classified. Knowing they can't be looked at is very intriguing, and I wonder if Dr. Griggs' report is among those files?

Redfern: What was the opinion of the old-time pilots that you personally were able to speak with?

Chester: To begin with, my investigation was inspired by Len Stringfield, who devoted many years to researching the UFO phenomenon. Stringfield felt that his own investigations had proven to him that on August 28, 1945 he had witnessed extraterrestrial aircraft.

Harold Augspurger, the commanding officer of the 415th NFS squadron, still feels that his sighting represented something far superior than what the Nazis were capable of producing back then. He had seen rockets and jets and they were totally different from what he had seen. His opinion is that until he is convinced otherwise, there is a good chance he too, witnessed something extraterrestrial.

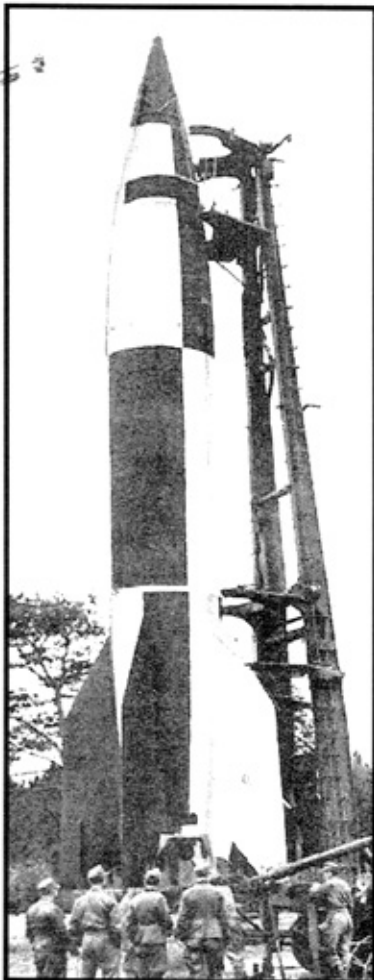
These two men are the strongest proponents of the extraterrestrial hypothesis that I personally communicated with. Most of the other veterans I spoke with sat on the fence, feeling that they had observed something strange and had no trouble entertaining the idea that what they saw was from another world. That concept was alive in the minds of many during the 1940s, so you can understand their acceptance of such ideas.

Some of the other witnesses I spoke with felt they had witnessed German technology, despite the lack of conclusive evidence. But I think that in general these men agreed they were witness to something pretty remarkable for the times, something that made most of them feel uneasy and shaken during their encounter with *whatever* they were.

Redfern: What is your personal conclusion based on your studies of wartime UFO activity?

Chester: I would have to say that due to my interaction with a few of the veterans, it has prompted me to support the theory that the UFO phenomenon is extraterrestrial in nature. That's just my opinion, and I am more than willing to alter my view in light of evidence discrediting that theory. But I have always accepted the idea that the human race is not alone in the universe, probably not alone within a close proximity to our solar system.

Who really knows? Who can confidently state that's not possible? I would, however, find it more shocking if the UFO phenomenon was discovered to be nothing more than misidentifications, natural and celestial phenomena, hallucinations, and hoaxes. To me, that discovery would be far more shocking than alien visitation.



Some of the other witnesses I spoke with felt they had witnessed German technology, despite the lack of conclusive evidence.

Redfern: What do you hope that the publication of the book will achieve?

Chester: Firstly, I hope *Strange Company* becomes a valuable resource to researchers of the UFO phenomenon and provides them with information that helps compliment their own research efforts. By no means is this book comprehensive; I feel my research effort has only scratched the surface of information that is

awaiting discovery in archives around the world.

When I began my investigation, one of the goals I wanted to achieve was to provide a valuable source of information that can be included alongside the works of those who inspired me and contributed greatly to the study of the UFO phenomenon: Donald Keyhoe, J. Allen Hynek, Edward Ruppelt, Jacques Vallee, Jerome Clark, Timothy Good, Wendy Connors, Barry Greenwood, Jan Aldrich, yourself, Richard Hall, Kevin Randle, and many more I don't have room to list. Only time will tell if I hit that mark, but I've given it my best shot.

Secondly, I hope the publication of this book finds its way to the remaining World War II veterans. Each day more and more accounts are lost for good. I hope it inspires those who have had a similar sighting or experience to come forward and contact me or one of the major UFO organizations; Mutual UFO Network (MUFON) and Center for UFO Studies (CUFOS).

Thirdly, I hope *Strange Company* reaches an audience, such as those interested in the Second World War, who would not normally pick up a UFO book. I believe the book will offer them a fresh and fascinating story, giving them a glimpse of a phenomenon that was occurring during an unprecedented time in mankind's history. In closing, I would like to thank you, Nick, for this interview and *UFO Magazine* for giving me this opportunity.

Keith Chester's *Strange Company: Military Encounters with UFOs in World War II* is published by Anomalist Books: www.anomalistbooks.com. ISBN: 1933665203. Price: \$17.95.

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