

OPINION PIECES

The 1952 Top-Secret USAF Instrumented UFO Data Collection Plan

By Fran Ridge

Editor's Note: This article is condensed from Fran Ridge's original 5,000-word paper, which contains additional material, such as information on UAPs and nuclear radiation detection, including successful triangulation cases and films from White Sands, New Mexico.

The United States Air Force (AF) had a top-secret plan to detect UFOs using instruments and obtain both electronic and photographic information decades before we thought of creating our instrumented Multiple Anomaly Detection & Automatic Recording ([MADAR](#)).

The National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP) team first discovered this top-secret project while updating our [1952 UFO Sighting Wave](#) chronology in 2005. [Project Grudge \(2/11/49\)](#), which had replaced the original [Project SIGN \(1/22/48\)](#), had publicly denounced the reality of UFOs for those first years. But that all changed when Project Blue Book (PBB) replaced Grudge in September 1951 and began collecting reports in earnest. But there was more to it than just PBB. It was higher than that. We had thought the Air Force was going to eliminate anecdotal accounts from witnesses and eventually "get rid" of PBB, but another possibility was that the Air Force wanted to keep better tabs on UFO activity, especially after the sobering, massive UFO wave of 1952. As early as January 3, 1952, somebody in the Air Force clearly demonstrated knowledge of the UFO problem. What you are about to read is the Air Force's effort to collect data on UFOs, while dismissing their validity, in the years after WWII is supported by documentation available online in NICAP files.

[January 3, 1952, SECRET Memo](#) - Brigadier General William M. Garland, Assistant for the Production of Intelligence, wrote a memorandum for General Samford, Director of Air Force Intelligence, with the title "SECRET." The subject, "Contemplated Action to Determine the Nature and Origin of the Phenomena Connected with the Reports of Unusual Flying Objects."

[January 29, 1952](#) - Captain Edward Ruppelt, PBB's director, on a trip to the Pentagon to brief Gen. Garland, visited the offices of Air Force Intelligence (AFOIN) having collections of UFO files, discovered that they had more complete files than did the Advanced Technical Intelligence Center (ATIC) in Dayton, and arranged to have copies of the various missing files made for him at Project Grudge (though multiple visits were required to obtain the copies and Ruppelt may not have succeeded in getting everything). These AFOIN offices with UFO files included the Technical Capabilities Branch (TCB) of the Evaluation Division (AFOIN-TCB or AFOIV-TC) and the Collection Control Branch of the Collection Division (AFOIN-CC or AFOIC-CC).

[January 29, 1952](#) - Project Grudge Status Report No. 3 mentioned that Gen. Garland and his staff at the Directorate of Intelligence, HQ USAF, were briefed on the status of the Project Grudge UFO Study. As documented, at this meeting Garland introduced a revolutionary new intelligence policy and methodology, which emphasized the use of instrumentation for intelligence collection, including to detect and track UFOs. (This would eventually be the basis for terminating PBB as an

intelligence function, converting it to a public relations psych war propaganda function beginning in July 1952 over a six-month transition period.).

On the same date, in his welcoming address to the SECRET compartmented MIT Project BEACON HILL in Cambridge, Mass., Gen. Garland gave marching orders to the assembled scientists to study ways Air Force intelligence methodology could be revolutionized through use of technology.

March 3, 1952 - As an interim last-chance measure to prove whether anecdotal sightings had any value, Gen. Garland approved of Ruppelt's publicity plan to draw in UFO reports from the public so triangulations might be obtained. This led to Garland secretly backing the famous [LIFE magazine](#) article by Robert Ginna.

Mid-March 1952 - Gen. Garland initiated a top-secret compartmented project (to be designed and built by Air Force R&D) to establish a global instrumented UFO detection and tracking system that would obviate the need for non-technical anecdotal UFO sighting reports, eventually resulting in approval of an official AF policy to de-emphasize or reject anecdotal UFO reports (July 28, 1952).¹

[March 19, 1952](#) - General Benjamin W. Chidlaw and his staff of the Air Defense Command (ADC), and General Gardner and his staff, Joint Air Defense Board, were briefed by an ATIC briefing team (Ruppelt) about PBB's plan. They agreed with it in principle and suggested that Chidlaw work out the details with the Director of Intelligence for the ADC, Brig. Gen. W. M. Burgess. Gen. Burgess designated Major Verne Sadowski of his staff to be the ADC liaison officer with New Grudge.

[March 26, 1952](#) - Gen. Garland sent ATIC Technical Analysis Division Chief, Colonel Sanford H. Kirkland, and PPB Chief, Lt. Edward J. Ruppelt, to brief MIT's Project BEACON HILL on UFOs.

[April 4, 1952](#) - Gen. Garland arranged for the AF-Rand Corp. satellite project to receive a UFO briefing from Ruppelt on a visit to ATIC. Ruppelt met and befriended Rand engineer, Jim Thompson.

June 5, 1952 - AF Intelligence initiated a series of internal staff studies on UFOs, inspired by Gen. Garland's new policy emphasizing instrumentation, which was circulated within AFOIN and its field element ATIC.²

December 1952 - Staff Studies led to policy and project plans approved by Director of Intelligence, Gen. Samford. Samford supported the use of instrumentation to identify UFOs. Here are the records of [Captain Ruppelt's own words](#). This much was written in his book and is public record.

[January 9, 1953](#) - SECRET letter to Miles Goll from H. C. Cross (PENTICLE MEMO) describing a large-scale military plan recommended to ATIC to secure evidence at high incident UFO areas and to collect instrumentation data.³ This is just a week before the CIA-sponsored meetings of Jan. 14-16.

My search for data in the NICAP files took me to 1970 without any mentions of the plan after January 9, 1953. So, I asked my colleague, Brad Sparks, if we had missed something that wasn't placed in the files and if the project had gone more covert. He told me the Air Force project became more sensitive and higher in classification. He suspected there are broken links in the 1969-70 chronology, such as the Bolender Memo and PBB closure, that may have more data. He also thought he might have some entries

¹ TOP SECRET, no document available. Based on a series of notes in PBB files reflecting this mission and project. A July ATIC draft UFO briefing for Gen. Samford, who was briefed on July 28, called it "going on instruments" analogizing it to aircraft navigation, etc.

² June 5, 1952, SECRET Air Force staff studies discussed the Blue Book Plan.

³ Jan 9, 1953; SECRET letter from Miles Goll to Ruppelt.

in 1959-63 chronology on documents referring to UFO incidents “bypassing the PBB system” long before the phrase was used (reused) in the Bolender Memo in October 1969. Colonel Friend confirmed to him in March 2000 that this meant PBB was not privy to UFOs tracked by classified sensor systems. The CIA “Father of Satellite Reconnaissance” former CIA Deputy Director for Plans, Richard Bissell, told him plans for infrared satellite tracking of UFOs were in development in the ‘50s to early ‘60s when he was in satellite work at the CIA.

In 1955-56, Lockheed and RAND corporations realized one type of satellite – the TV camera version (going back to Gen. Garland, March 1952) – was impossible because it required massive data rates and could not image moving aircraft or UFOs. The second type – the infrared sensor satellite – was viable because it looked for hotspot heat sources and only transmitted that highly relevant data, ignoring the irrelevant cool Earth background, which was massively repetitive and useless. The first infrared satellites became operational in 1970. Continental-sized radar beam coverage by OTH [Over the Horizon] radars transferred to NORAD in 1968 (not the limited 200- to 300-mile range of typical NORAD radars, but OTH of lower resolution and with other issues.

Reports likely collected by USAF UFO instrumented detection systems

Vietnam War. UFO reports were consistently being collected and investigated, in various forms, with the primary purpose being to determine whether these events were related to enemy activity. Often, they were not. So far, from just a few reports Paul Dean found, Brad Sparks compiled some stats on about 500 UFO sensor trackings by radar-visual, laser range-finder, video camera, night scope, and infrared in 1968-69.⁴ The many sightings in Vietnam strongly suggested there was a potential for an escalation that might have led to a nuclear confrontation with the super powers. We have to thank Australian researcher Paul Dean and American researchers, Barry Greenwood and Brad Sparks, for this information.

“Except for two probable helicopters shot down on June 16 and 17, 1968, this network was completely unable to identify any of the other 500 tracks or so. The stats are an incredible 99.6% Unknowns, IFOs 0.4%. To help the IFO cause, a conservative guestimate of maybe five IFOs in the uncertain early phase in mid-June 1968 would make this 99% Unknowns, 1% IFOs, a devastating statistic. These are from INSTRUMENT SENSORS. No more hopeless reliance on mere human anecdotal evidence. The 7th AF history clearly states it was about ‘UFO's’ not about helicopters, it only began initially with “unidentified helicopters” as of around June 15-16, 1968. But it took a deadly turn with the friendly fire of anti-aircraft missiles hitting a ship (Aussie HMAS Hobart) instead of aircraft (helicopters). Then they realized it was UFOs...Now we have two brand new codenames for UFO sensor tracking networks: HAVE FEAR and LETHAL CHASE.” – Brad Sparks

The evidence is clear. While the Air Force publicly played down UFOs, up until the time Project Blue Book was shut down in January 1970, serious top-secret work was being conducted. In the very beginning, Project SIGN scientists were purged because they were “believers.” Project Grudge hired personnel who were trained and operated under the consensus that “whatever you see or hear, don't believe it.” But as you saw earlier, somebody just didn't want the public to know about it, yet needed the public to report what the systems were picking up.

⁴ Francis Ridge, *CAP POINT*, 2021, pgs. 185-198.