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UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECTS AND
EXTRATERRESTRIAL LIFE: DO THEY EXIST?

An Honors Special Studies Report
By:

Marty Wooddell
December 14, 1970

In my Honors Special Studies I have undertaken a scientific investigation of Unidentified Flying Objects, and the probabilities or possibilities of extraterrestrial life. As will be shown by my findings, there are, at present, only theories with no conclusive proof concerning these phenomena. For this reason, this paper will not be simply composed of scientific findings, but it will be the specualtions and conclusions I have arrived at from making the study.

I will begin by considering Unidentified Flying Objects. Some people say UFO's have been appearing since Bible times. They base this belief from passages in the Old Testament book of Ezekiel. However, the first actual UFO sighting is attributed to Kenneth Arnold, a pilot who while flying spotted a group of objects "like saucers skipping across water." This was June 24, 1947. Arnold's sighting has yet to be explained. That summer many more sightings were reported. In the two decades since then, there have been over 15,000 sightings reported. Of these, about 90% have been explained. (1)

The United States Air Force have been the governmental agency in charge of explaining UFO's. They have files on UFO's called the Project Blue Book, some of which is classified information. In 1966, the Air Force closed their Project Blue Book and shifted their attempts of explaining UFO's to a special organized team under their governmental spon-

sorship. This team was headed by physicist Edward Condon, from the University of Colorado. Condon's team of twelve men included astronomers, physicists, and psychologists in addition to consultants. The Condon team was given complete access to the Air Force's files and picked the fifty-nine seemingly most difficult to explain sightings. (2)

After two years of this study, Condon and his team concluded that UFO's have no scientific justification. Although 100% of the reported sightings have not been explained, most of them have been rationally accounted for. Some explanations and doubts of UFO's are as follow. Some UFO's were claimed to have interfered with automobile engines. A Ford Moter Company representative says a magnetic field would stall a car, but it would be so strong it would also bend the metal frame of the car. Some sightings were found to be vorter rings formed when diesel oil, gas, and white phosphorus were exploded by TNT during Army demonstrations. Reports of night flying UFO's with flashing lights in Colorado were found to be polyethylene, candle-heated, hot-air ballooms launched by two high-school boys. Then, of coarse, there are always the fakes--people who make-up or purposely disguise photographs as UFO sightings. (3)

So, the Condon report was drawn to a close. This report produced no findings to confirm beliefs that UFO's are from outer space. Condon said he thought there was no need for further study. A special review panel set up

by the National Academy of Sciences recommended and endorsed the Condon report. This panel was satisfied with their historical research of UFO's, review of UFO literature, ingeniously arranged lab tests, and expert work done in the field of radar, optics, meteorology, and perception which helped to explain UFO's. But this investigation did have some strong critics, including the NIACP (National Investigation Committee for Aerial Phenomena). In answering the NIACP, Condon admits that there are some cases where identification with natural phenomena can be made, but there is also no positive evidence that these sightings are extraterrestrial visitors. (4)

Although Condon lacks scientific evidence to explain UFO origins, he is broad minded enough to at least speculate on the possibility of UFO's being visitors from other planets. But he explains, if UFO's were such, they would have to be a type of life we know nothing of. They would have to be greatly technologically advanced from us, at least 50,000 years advanced, and probably from another solar system. Most scientists, one of which is Condon, shy away from this speculation and call it science fiction. But, if we have progressed as much as we have in our short history, what would be possible to accomplish over a vast span of time? So, however low the probability of outer space visitors to our planet may be, can it really be ranked at zero? (5)

The Condon report is not the only investigation concerned

with UFO's. There have been many independent scientific studies to explain them. One such investigation is a group of scientists lead by Dr. Robert S. Powell of Falls Church, Virginia. This group is independent of governmental support although they have consulted with the Condon team. These independent scientists believe they have found the answer to UFO's. They have produced a glowing gas by igniting ammonia vapor with a high voltage spark. This results in a disc-shaped, inverted, saucer-top sometimes with the appearance of tiny windows around the rim. These can be traced by radar, and they produce a "charge field that could affect radio performance nearby," which are characteristic of the unexplainable UFO's. This phenomenon could be created in nature by gases of newly fertilized fields or swamps, set off by a spark from a power line or lightning. So, maybe this could be the much sought after answer. (6)

In the event that UFO's might be forms of extraterrestrial life, what are some of the possibilities or probabilities of life forms on other planets? The study to determine the existence of extraterrestrial life began with a study to elicit the growth of organisms from lunar matter, the first samples from the Apollo 11 Mission. Biological examination of fifty grams of this substance confirm negative results obtained by the Manned Spacecraft Center quarantine team. No viable life forms, including terrestrial contaminants, were found when the sample was tested in three hundred separate environments. The samples were found to be completely inorganic. Therefore, no possibility of life is

even considered to be on the moon. (7)

Now, considering the possibility of life on other planets, let us look at the two most commonly discussed planets, Venus and Mars. Life as we know it could not exist much closer to our sun than Venus nor much farther away than Mars. Even though these are thought to be rather similar to the Earth in comparison with other planets, they are extremely different from our planet. Venus has an atmosphere of 90% carbon dioxide. Also, Venus' temperature is a great deal higher than ours since it is closer to the sun. Venus has a much smaller amount of water vapor than Earth, although Venus' amount of water vapor is greater than Mars'. (8)

Of these two planets, Mars has appeared to be the more serious contender as an abode of life, though these possibilities are extremely slim. From Earth-based observations the most we can accomplish is to exclude the possibility that life in any of the forms we know could survive on Mars. But, whether or not there could be other forms of life is the relevant question. Let us then consider the Martian environment and its possibilities for life. Our best estimates show the temperature of Mars to be above freezing for about four hours a day, reaching a peak of about 30° C. in the summer months. Each afternoon the temperature plunges below zero where it remains for some twenty hours or so. Although at such temperatures does no life exist on Earth, it has been experimentally shown that life could survive under such temperatures. Then, the fact that

there is an absence of oxygen in Mars atmosphere can be dismissed as a reason to preclude the existence of life on Mars. The insistence by some people, unfortunately even some scientists, that life demands oxygen is simple ignorance of our own biology. In fact, there are a great host of organisms, even on Earth, which thrive upon and even require the absence of oxygen. One very important factor of Mars' environment conditions is that of low vapor pressure. Because of this the boiling temperature of water is greatly affected. Inasmuch as vital functions of life are confined between boiling and freezing points of water, the range of vitality will be restricted on Mars. Another argument against life on Mars, and the most important one, is the scarcity of water and its narrow liquid range. However, although the amount of water on Mars is small, scientists think there might be a possibility of localized concentrations of the water present to be enough for life. So, as one can see, there would have to be many problems worked out before one could have an optimistic outlook toward life on Mars or any other planet in our solar system. (9)

Another interesting phenomenon which some people believe points to extraterrestrial life is unexplainable radio signals or pulsations. In Puerto Rico, a radio telescope antenna reflected faint radio signals from outer space. Where did these come from? No one knows. These radio pulsations have come to be called "pulsers." Some scientists believe

these are from other civilizations, maybe in another solar system. There are roughly 150 billion stars in our Milky Way Galaxy, of which our sun is a part. A good many of these resemble our sun in size and composition. There is difficulty, however, in trying to prove that these radio signals come from another spiral galaxy, for it would take several million years for messages to reach us from even the closest one. But, in our galaxy there are a number of sun-like stars closer than 30 light years away which could reach us in a human life time. Some scientists believe these radio pulsations can be interpreted. Some call them signals, some messages. One thing most scientists do believe is that UFO's are not such message carriers since it would take so long to reach us. (10)

So, that is what the scientists say about it. Now it is my turn. First, my opinions of UFO's. A good many, in fact most, UFO sightings I believe are either pranks, people trying to get their name in the news, or more often honest mistakes. What could be explained as honest mistakes are such examples as the previously discussed glowing ammonia vapor or other man-made phenomena. On the other hand, we have the few cases of virtually unexplainable UFO sightings. Of these cases, I have but one thing to say. I believe these few cases are the true UFO's. Before one jumps to conclusions let me explain how I define "UFO's". I take the words for their literal meaning; thus they are exactly what their name implies, Unidentified Flying Objects. Not to say "flying objects" are types of air vehicle or

space craft, but to say they are some unexplained phenomena in the sky. I dare to say I do not believe UFO's are visitors from other planets. I risk this statement, even though I have all present-day science behind me, in the hope that I and today's most notable and brilliant scientists are not being too narrow minded. Is it possible we are like the generation of a hundred years ago whose stories of man visiting the moon were simply fairy tales of children? This is a thought provoking question. Although I do say it a tiny bit hesitant, my scientific, realistic self stands with the majority who say UFO's are not forms of extraterrestrial life.

In stating this personal belief, I ask myself, am I also concluding there is no extraterrestrial life? To this question I can truthfully, and without having to use as much imagination, answer no. I do not believe there is yet enough scientific evidence to close the door on the possibility of extraterrestrial life. I have quoted scientific facts which give a dim prospect of life, as we know it at least, existing on such planets as Venus and Mars. Yet, are we so far advanced to be able to even predict, much less prove or disprove, that life, as we know it or otherwise, exists on one of the many planets, solar systems, or galaxies in the vastness of space? To this question I answer a resounding no. Even though I can agree with scientists on their real-

istic approach to answering the UFO question, I cannot bring myself to have such a ready and waiting answer concerning extraterrestrial life. I reserve the right keep an open mind and see what answers future investigations and discoveries in science bring about.

Maybe this Honors Special Studies did not provide satisfactory answers, for some people, concerning this subject. But in my attempt to find answers and explanations to satisfy myself, I believe I have discovered a truth far more important than a simple answer to a specific question. That truth is the fact that in a scientific search of the unknown, more often than not, more questions are asked than are answered. But, is this so bad? Behind every search for truth should be the attitude that the whole truth cannot be found until every possible pathway is traced to its end. Although time has not yet allowed this search to be completed, I believe the correct start has been undertaken, through the investigation of one path of knowledge at a time.

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