

Official Reticence

Written by Wilbert Smith

Wednesday, 05 August 2009 17:57 - Last Updated Wednesday, 05 August 2009 18:04

I am often asked if I can give an answer to the official reticence in the matter of flying saucers. I am afraid that there is no single reason, only a combination of circumstances, each contributing in their own way to a situation which would be ludicrous if it were really not so pathetic.

The current interest in flying saucers dates from the Kenneth Arnold sight in 1947. At the time the gentlemen of the press seized upon the item and it was featured far and wide throughout the world, with far more emphasis on its news value than its significance. This was followed by reports of many more sightings and a style was set. Soon everyone was stylist and on the band wagon; jokes and cartoons were created and published and the whole matter lost what little perspective it had and arrived at the public consciousness completely out of context and misrepresented. Consequently, it became practically impossible for a casual enquirer to sort out the facts from the fictions, legends and speculations which mushroomed up and became the "literature" of the subject. After foundering a while in the morass most people just gave up and relied for their opinions on some authority.

To most people the government is the final authority, but they seldom realize that government is made up of a large number of people who are experts in their own fields, but very much laymen in other fields. If, within government, there is no bureau within which a new situation will fit neatly, it is entirely homeless unless and until a suitable bureau can be created. But the creation of a government bureau requires a definite act by the government, and the voting and expenditure of public funds, which in turn has to be justified publicly. Consequently, when a situation develops such as the advent of flying saucers, it is unfair to expect an early answer from government. The best that a government can do under such circumstances is to make use of a "back door" arrangement with which we are all familiar, namely, the "classified project." But even this is a gamble in that it is predicated on the project yielding positive results with the answers all tied up in a neat little bundle, otherwise the project flops and slips into oblivion.

The United states tried this latter approach but it backfired, through a unique series of circumstances which I shall try to outline. Although I was in no way involved with the United States flying saucer investigations, I do know how these projects work and how they fit into the overall structure, so I feel my analysis is valid.

Any project starts out with its initial directive or terms of reference from which it evolves its strategy and then works out suitable tactics. Since flying saucers were obviously in the domain of the Air Force, and the vast publicity accorded them resulted in a deluge of inquiries and demand for an explanation of what was going on in the skies, the obvious course was for the air

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force to set up a project with a directive to look at this new situation and try to get them off the hook. With this sort of directive the strategy was of course to gather actual sighting data and then rationalize it as far as possible. Since it was obviously convenient to classify the project, the tactics at once developed into a one way pipe line, with all sorts of information going in, and nothing coming out. This of course made many people unhappy and suspicious, which fact was seized upon, publicized, magnified, and built up into a sinister plot to keep the public in ignorance.

Within the Air Force, as in any other large established organization, Parkinson's law has been at work for some time and we find lots of chiefs but not too many Indians. Every job, large or small, is invariably delegated through many levels of responsibility until it finally arrives at the low man on the totem pole who does the work. Consequently, the only people who are entirely familiar with the job is the low man on the totem pole and his supervisor.

From time to time progress reports are prepared and started along their long and tedious way up the ladder, and since each successive level is progressively more remote from the actual work, each level strikes out of the report those references which to him seem inappropriate, and at long last a thoroughly emasculated version arrives at the desk of the individual who started the whole thing off in the first place. If any information on the subject is to be released it is almost invariably based on this mutilated version and not on the work as actually done at the working level.

This situation is further aggravated by the fact that personnel at the various levels have a habit of changing and successive reports receive different treatment, so that the corresponding "edited" versions arriving at the top level are often are often inconsistent and contradictory. In the case of the flying saucer projects we have seen all these factors at work with a vengeance.

The question may well, and probably will be asked, Are the top brass unaware of the situation, and if they know about it why don't they fix it? The answer is very simple; they do know, but to fix it would mean by-passing of the hierarchy and the destruction of a highly satisfactory system. The system breaks down only when it tries to cope with an entirely alien situation, which happens rarely, otherwise it works effectively and efficiently. The trouble is that the flying saucer situation is definitely alien.

It may be well to remember that initially there may have been some legitimate fear of the saucers, but this fear did not last long. It soon became apparent that these objects did not

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constitute any particular menace to humanity and there was practically nothing which could be done about it if they did. They came and went as they pleased with little or no apparent concern whether we saw them or not. They were in complete control and we were merely casual observers. Consequently, to the Air Force, since they constituted no apparent threat to national security, they were reduced to a mere nuisance value, and that nuisance was to be rid of the whole thing. But there was no one else to carry the ball and the air force stuck with it.

Unfortunately, since the classified projects were largely aimed at "explaining away" these things, a certain position had to be taken by the Air Force, and having just painted themselves into a corner, now must wait until the paint dries. What solid information that did come out of these projects was most disturbing indeed, striking at the very root of our conventional science. But there wasn't enough of this information on which to base any substantial reform in scientific thinking; just enough to produce an uneasy feeling that all is not well. So naturally, the least said about it the better, until more was known. One can't just come out and say that the velocity of light is not a universal constant, or that Newton's laws don't always work, or that gravity isn't the primary force after all.

Officialdom is fidgeting in their chairs hoping for some sort of scientific, mathematical or experimental breakthrough which will tie together the loose ends and explain away the whole flying saucer business without having to go beyond the bounds of conventional science. In other words the status quo is more important than new knowledge. Meanwhile, since they do not have enough answers for the questions which are now being raised, they most certainly aren't going to invite a deluge of further questions admitting anything.

There is one more facet that I would like to deal with. Many people have wondered why the politicians have not picked up the ball, but the answer lies in the concert of politics itself. Politicians have two interests in life; first to win an election, and second, to do as good a job as possible of representing their constituency. Neither of these could be considered as embracing flying saucer investigations. True, a member of the house may ask questions about flying saucers, suggest that something might be done about their study, or even introduce a bill to take definite action, but without strong public support the result is only so much more wordage in the official record. Furthermore, because of the type of publicity from which the whole flying saucer subject has suffered, politicians who are naturally very sensitive to public reaction, are reluctant to stick their necks out.

In light of the foregoing reasoning I feel that we need not expect any significant statement with respect to flying saucers by any government agency. The nearest we can come to getting an official statement is from a few sincere researchers in the government service who, themselves,

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are satisfied of their findings and willing to risk the censure of their colleagues and the prestige of their positions. More often than not these people must wait until they retire from the government service before they feel free to make any statement at all.

In conclusion I would like to draw an analogy with the story of a man who was accused in court of stealing chickens. The farmer, his son and the hired man had all testified that they had seen the man steal the chickens, but when the judge asked him what he had to say for himself he just grinned and said, "Sir, I can produce twice as many people what didn't see me steal those chickens!" I am afraid that this is typical of the thinking of many people.