

only reproduced the outlines of the continents but also showed the topography of the interiors! Mountain ranges, mountain peaks, islands, rivers, and plateaus were drawn in with extreme accuracy...." He says that the Antarctic mountain ranges that already are on Reis' maps were not discovered until 1952. He states that they have been ice covered for hundreds of years, and our present-day maps have been drawn with the help of echo-sounding devices.

Many other observations of what we now call UFOs have been recorded by historians throughout ancient and modern history. According to USAF Archive *BLUE BOOK Project Files*, in 1254, at Saint Albans Abbey, "when the moon was eight days old, there appeared in the sky a ship elegantly shaped, well equipped, and of marvelous color." In 1520, there appeared in France a round shaped object with rotating lights and "two fiery suns."

The major wave of UFO sightings that ushered in the modern era of UFOs in 1947 was not the first instance of strange apparitions in the sky frightening the American people. On 24 January 1878, Jacques Vallee says a Texas farmer reported seeing a "dark flying object in the shape of a disk cruising in the sky at a wonderful speed." During 1896 and 1897, David Saunders and Roger Harkins, in *UFOs? Yes!* say a "mysterious airship" was reported all across the United States. The sightings seem to have begun on 22 November 1896 in Oakland, California, when a group of streetcar passengers saw a "winged cigar that projected a stream of brilliant light." After being seen over Utah, Colorado, Texas, Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan, the "ship" returned to the Chicago area.

On 11 April 1897, Walter McCann of Rogers Park, a town 28 miles north of Chicago, took two snapshots of the ship, perhaps the first known UFO photographs. According to Vallee, the *New York Herald* reported that the plates literally were given the acid test and "pronounced genuine reproductions of an object in the air, and not the creations of a studio."

The early part of the 20th century was relatively devoid of UFO reports but brought at least one prominent sighting from an American explorer, Nicholas Roerich, in the wilds of Mongolia. His *Altai-Himalaya: A Travel Diary* notes on 5 August 1926 that "... in a direction from north to south, something big and shiny reflecting the sun, like a huge oval moving at great speed..." was seen. Roerich says it crossed his camp and changed direction from south to southwest and disappeared. He says, "We even had time to take our field glasses and saw quite distinctly an oval form with shiny surface, one side of which was brilliant from the sun."

Although the modern UFO period is traditionally dated from the 1947 Kenneth Arnold experience near Mount Ranier, the modern era actually began in Nazi-occupied Europe near the close of World War II. During the winter of 1944-45, American pilots encountered varicolored circular fireballs, which they called "foo fighters." These mysterious light blobs would fly along harmlessly as long as no effort was made to get rid of them. Sometimes the foo fighters were content to dance about and play tag with our aircraft, but at other times they appeared in precise formations. At the time, intelligence officers believed that the balls might be radar-controlled objects sent up to foul the planes' ignition systems or to interfere with Allied radar networks. The only trouble with this hypothesis was that the German pilots were also being plagued by the same mysterious companions. The foo fighters weren't restricted to Europe. The glowing balls of light also played follow-the-leader with B-29 crews on bombing runs over Japan and have subsequently turned up for both the Korean and Vietnam conflicts, according to Gen. George S. Brown in his 16 October 1973 speech to the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Project SIGN

It was purely coincidental that the U.S. government became concerned with UFOs in the same year that the Air Force became a separate service. Officially the problem began on 24 June 1947.

Kenneth Arnold, a Boise, Idaho, businessman and private pilot was flying alone near Mt. Ranier, Washington, when he sighted a group of nine disk-like objects soaring in formation. Upon landing, according to Edward Ruppelt in *The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects*, Arnold described their motion as that of a "saucer skipping across water." *A Survey of Press Coverage of Unidentified Flying Objects, 1947-1966* by Herbert J. Strentz states that those words led some newsmen to call the objects "flying saucers," and, judging from a sketch that Arnold made for Air Force investigators, "saucer-like" seemed an accurate description. The Arnold sightings received extensive press coverage—especially when the Air Force denied owning the objects. Within days of Arnold's sighting, more reports came in. *Life* gave the subject extensive nationwide coverage in a 21 July 1947 article, "A Rash of Flying Disks Breaks Out Over the U.S."

Because flying saucers presumably fly—and anything that flies is Air Force business—the Air Force, whether it wanted to or not, soon became involved. At

first there was no coordinated effort to collect data on these strange reports, simply because there were no specific orders to do so. Then, in a 23 September 1947 letter to the Commanding General, Army Air Forces, Lt. Gen. Nathan F. Twining, Commander of the Air Material Command (AMC), Wright Field, Ohio, committed his service to the quest. Concluding that "the phenomenon reported is something real and not visionary or fictitious," General Twining recommended a special study of the matter.

Answering Twining for the Air Force Chief of Staff, Maj. Gen. L. C. Craigie, Director of Research and Development, instructed AMC to set up a special investigative project. Noting that "it is Air Force policy not to ignore reports of sightings and phenomena in the atmosphere, but to recognize that part of its mission is to collect, collate, evaluate, and act on information of this nature," *BLUE BOOK Project Files* show that Craigie assigned the new project the code name SIGN with a security classification of "restricted."

The first explanation to come to mind, of course, was that a foreign power had developed a new and potentially sinister device posing an obvious threat to our security. As frightening as this might seem, it was nonetheless a concept that the military mind could immediately grasp and with which it felt it could come to grips. Thus Project SIGN was staffed in AMC's Air Technical Intelligence Center (ATIC), forerunner of the present-day Foreign Technology Division (FTD) of Air Force Systems Command. This group went to work to examine the first series of reports. It soon became obvious that the reported actions of the flying saucers did not fit the expected pattern of technologically advanced military devices.

Although the majority of UFO sightings could be explained by known phenomena (aircraft, balloons, meteors), the unexplainable pile continued to grow. New reports, containing considerable data describing the high speed and maneuverability of the saucers, built to a crest in mid-1947. Press files, according to Ted Bloecher in the May 1967 issue of "The UFO Investigator," yield about 800 UFO reports for 1947. Typical sightings of this period included a rocket-shaped object with two rows of windows along the side, seen over the Hague in the Netherlands. Four nights later, the pilot and copilot of an Eastern Airlines DC-3 reported a near collision over Montgomery, Alabama, with a "torpedo-shaped" object about 100 feet long and with two rows of brightly lit windows along the side. Similar UFOs were reported over Robins AFB, Georgia; MacDill AFB, Florida; and Clark AFB, in