

# UFO 'sightings' checked out by Ottawa, records show

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interesting record of what the airmen, bureaucrats and ministers thought they should do about the good citizens of Canada who persisted in seeing mysteries in the sky and about those who wrote letters to complain that the Government was keeping the "truth" about UFOs from the public.

Like so many other fads coming up from the south, flying saucers and the like got to Canada a bit late after their start in Idaho. The U.S. Air Force had already wrapped up a two-year investigation of UFOs when Canada started to get serious in 1950 and 1951 about investigating the phenomena that an increasing number of Canadians were reporting.

In April, 1952, the year when sightings seemed to have peaked, the Defence Research Board met to approve a formal reporting system in which RCAF intelligence officers were to interview those who had reported sightings and to fill out a monstrous form, which the military labelled Project Second Story.

The bureaucracy sprang into action. Only two days after the DRB let the form-fillers loose, N. R. Ronberg of the RCAF security police at Camp Borden was dispatched to find out more about what the Barrie veteran had seen the night of Oct. 9, 1951.

He found the three spacecraft were fuelled by alcohol. In the words of the report, when Mr. Ronberg arrived, the observer was "stretched out on his bed, fully clothed and under the influence of alcohol. The kitchen was littered

with empty beer bottles and a number of full beer bottles were observed in the bedroom. It was not possible to interrogate him."

Two days later, when the observer was sober, the interview finally took place but the air force decided it did not have a reliable report.

But aging veterans were not the only observers to be found wanting. Newspaper editors suffered the same fate.

On April 21, 1951, the Lindsay, Ont., Post had triple-headed a report by a member of the editorial board who had just happened to look skyward as he was observing his flower beds on a quiet Sunday morning.

"Flying Saucers over Lindsay? Mystery Craft Sighted over Lindsay Sunday. Made Sound Like Rushing of Wind," the headline screamed.

But Squadron Leader J. N. Nalty, who was sent to Lindsay posthaste to interview the editor of the paper, for it was he who had been diverted from his tiptoe through the tulips to the parachute-shaped objects leaving vapor trails in the sky, was not impressed.

He described the editor as "an apparently sincere but definitely unreliable observer" and added "the interrogator could not avoid the impression that the observer, as editor, may have been unduly influenced by the fact that flying saucers made an excellent headline for a dull Monday morning."

If editors were not always the best observers, flyboys could also get overly excited by what they saw in the sky in 1952. On Aug. 21, the

lads who were manning the control tower at Trenton air base, one of the largest RCAF bases in the land, were aroused when they saw a brightly lighted object shimmering and wavering in the distance. They even got a radar echo from it.

But they cooled off and took a precise measurement of its location and found that it was the planet Jupiter and decided that the radar reading was an "anomalous propagation caused by temperature inversion."

By 1954, after intelligence officers had filled out page after page of the forms, the Government's scientists decided it was not worth the effort. In a letter to the RCAF, the chairman of the DRB said that the "most of the observational material does not lend itself to a scientific method of investigation."

"Consequently, while all sighting reports are still collected when submitted by the general public, no further attempt has been made to analyze the data submitted."

But that did not stop the public from writing about what they found. Typical was a Hamilton woman who eagerly wrote to say that at 2:50 a.m. on Feb. 6, 1959, she had been lying in bed and looking out a nearby window when she saw "this vehicle come into view from the mountain, proceeding from south to north, steadily, noiselessly, seemingly at tree-top height."

"It looked to be passing over Gage Park. Its flashing intermittent lights were orange in color with a bigger light on the front extension. I only saw it when the

lights were on. I couldn't see the shape but it was not like an aeroplane."

The Hamilton woman received an acknowledgement but no RCAF intelligence officer went to interview her.

By then, the letters were starting to come in from those who wanted to know what the Canadian Government knew about UFOs but would not tell the public. The most persistent writer of such letters was Ken Klaasen, a Vancouverite who billed himself an investigator for the "National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena."

In the 1960-1963 period, Mr. Klaasen carried on a series of correspondence with senior RCAF officers and two ministers of defence, Douglas Harkness and Paul Hellyer.

The letters presented the Government with a Catch-22 situation, as Mr. Klaasen regularly took the position that if the Government would not answer his questions about UFOs, he would know it either did not have the information or was keeping it secret.

In the summer of 1962, Mr. Harkness tried to tell him all was well. Of UFOs, the minister wrote: "If this term is used to mean artificial objects which are directed by an intelligence other than human, and of extra-terrestrial origin, then we can state that there is no evidence of the existence of such objects and that if any evidence becomes available, it would not be withheld from the Canadian public."

But the files show that those who

believed in UFOs and flying saucers and the like were not only representatives of groups like NICAP and the Intercontinental Aerial Research Foundation.

The late Wilbert B. Smith, who rose in the bureaucracy to be superintendent of the Radio Regulation Engineering section at the Department of Transport, was a believer as well.

The longest portion of the DRB minutes for the April, 1952, meeting that approved the systematic collection of UFO data is devoted to his explanation of the extra-terrestrial theory for the origin of UFOs.

(DRB chairman O. M. Solandt balanced the books at the meeting by reporting on the terrestrial theory as propounded by an executive of A. V. Roe aircraft company, namely that they were a new type of aircraft, "presumably Russian.")

Mr. Smith, who gets a snide mention in a couple of memos as the self-appointed chairman of a Canadian committee on UFOs, is reported in the files to have been the head of a UFO research project, Project Magnet, which was of his own undertaking and for which there are no records of the findings in Defence Department files.

In the end, Ottawa seems not to have taken Mr. Smith too seriously. Rather, it followed the advice that it got from the Americans in 1950 when Canada first started to look into UFOs: ignore them as far as possible, for every report of Government interest in the sightings will only increase the number of sightings that are reported.