

'Urge to Investigate and Believe' Sparks New Interest in U.F.O.'s

ST Friedman

By WILLIAM J. BROAD

The aliens are here again, at least in terms of popular culture, if not fact.

Three books about alien visits are selling briskly; one of them has topped the nonfiction best seller list for weeks. Clubs, newsletters, movies, and lectures about unidentified flying objects are generating revenues at a pace exceeded only in the 1950's, during the first wave of U.F.O. sightings.

Enthusiasts are now even charging that for 40 years the Federal Government has harbored physical evidence of an earthly encounter with extraterrestrial creatures, including their lifeless bodies and damaged spacecraft. That startling report, dismissed by skeptics and Government officials as a laughable hoax, is contained in what purport to be top-secret Government papers from the Eisenhower era.

Why the fascination with aliens, despite repeated failures over the decades to document their earthly arrival?

In interviews, psychologists, historians, philosophers and writers of science fiction said belief in alien encounters was rooted in such things as the need for secular messiahs and the search for explanations for terrestrial troubles.

"The urge to investigate and believe in this stuff is almost religious," said Ben Bova, former editor of *Omni* magazine and a writer of science fiction. "We used to have gods. Now we want to feel we're not alone, watched

over by protective forces far beyond us."

But others, often sober, respectable scientists who have studied U.F.O. reports for years, said the skeptics were missing the biggest story of the age.

"People who haven't been paying attention to this stuff are in for a shock," said Dr. Bruce Maccabee, a full-time Navy physicist in Washington, D.C., and a part-time U.F.O. researcher. "Some sort of things have been flying around for decades, and they aren't ours."

The current U.F.O. flurry is led by new books: "Communion" by Whitely Strieber (Morrow), "Intruders" by Budd Hopkins (Random House), and "Light Years" by Gary Kinder (Atlantic Monthly Press). "Communion"

has been on The New York Times best seller list for 16 weeks.

All three tell of personal encounters with aliens. In this they differ from the last great period of U.F.O. enthusiasm, in the 1950's, said David M. Jacobs, author of "The U.F.O. Controversy in America" and a historian at Temple University in Philadelphia. In the 1950's U.F.O. sightings were in vogue. Now, he said, we are in a "new era" in which aliens are taken as fact and attention had turned to "people's experiences" with them.

Indeed, the hottest topic among U.F.O. enthusiasts is what they describe as the Federal Government's experience with aliens, especially the "Roswell Incident," one of the oldest U.F.O. episodes on the books. Timothy Good, a British U.F.O. researcher, and a group of U.F.O. investigators in the United States say they have documentary evidence that the Government hid its knowledge that a "flying saucer" crashed in 1947 near Roswell, N. M., killing its crew of extraterrestrial creatures. The charges are contained in Mr. Good's book "Above Top Secret: The Worldwide U.F.O. Cover-Up," to be published in Britain in July.

The Roswell Incident

The Government's position is that the 1947 incident was nothing more than the sighting of a weather balloon. But the U.F.O. researchers cite a newly discovered document, dated Nov. 18, 1952, purportedly a top-secret briefing paper for President-elect Dwight D. Eisenhower. It discusses a secret Federal team known as Majestic-12, or MJ-12, established by President Truman on Sept. 24, 1947 to investigate the of the spacecraft and its crew.

"It appears to be genuine," said William L. Moore, who wrote a book about the incident and who investigated the document for more than two years after a colleague received it anonymously in the mail. But he said there is nothing in the records "that shows it's a fraud."

"Nonsense," replied Philip J. Klass, a leading U.F.O. debunker and chairman of the U.F.O. subcommittee of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, a respected group of scientists. Mr. Klass said he had seen the document and considered it "an outright hoax."

The document purportedly recounts a secret briefing to President-elect Eisenhower by Rear Adm. Roscoe H. Hillenkoetter, the first director of the Central Intelligence Agency,

Experts say belief is rooted in part in the need to explain earthly problems.

who is now dead. According to the document, Admiral Hillenkoetter was a member of Majestic-12. It begins with a chronology of crash near Roswell.

"On 07 July, 1947," it says, "a secret operation was begun to assure

recovery of the wreckage of this object for scientific study. During the course of this operation, aerial reconnaissance discovered that four small human-like beings had apparently ejected from the craft at some point before it exploded. These had fallen to earth about two miles east of the wreckage site. All four were dead and badly decomposed due to action by predators and exposure to the elements during the approximately one week time period which had elapsed before their discovery."

"A special scientific team took charge of removing these bodies for study. The wreckage of the craft was also removed to several different locations. Civilian and military witnesses in the area were debriefed, and news reporters were given the effective cover story that the object had been a misguided weather research balloon."

By November 1947, the briefing continued, a Federal team of scientists had concluded "that although these creatures are human-like in appearance, the biological and evolutionary processes responsible for their development has been quite different from those observed or postulated in homo-sapiens."

Stanton T. Friedman, a nuclear physicist in Frederickton, New Brunswick, Canada, who is investigating the document with Mr. Moore and who lectures widely on U.F.O.'s, acknowledged that interest it generated would raise lecture fees but said their goal was to get at the truth.

"We're dealing with something of extraordinary importance," he said. "What this means is that we humans are not the big shots we think we are." He said the landing was concealed because "no Government wants people to have their allegiance to the planet rather than themselves."