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" WASHINGTON VIEWPOINT "

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GUEST: Lt. Col. Lawrence J. Tacker
Chief of the Magazine & Book Branch of the
Air Force Office of Information.

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Sid Davis
Washington Correspondent

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"WASHINGTON VIEWPOINT"

CORRICK: Good evening. This is Ann Corrick with Sid Davis at the Pentagon in Washington. Washington Viewpoint tonight is concerned with a curious controversy -- flying saucers. Are they real or are they imagined?

Our guest on Washington Viewpoint has devoted many years of study to this question. He is Lieutenant Colonel Lawrence J. Tacker, a war combat veteran and master navigator with the United States Air Force. Colonel Tacker currently is Chief of the Magazine and Book Branch of the Air Force Office of information. His long-time interest in reports of flying saucers, or unidentified flying objects as they're called, led him to publish a book earlier this month which describes just what the Air Force is doing about persistent reports that some one somewhere has actually spotted flying saucers. The title of Colonel Tacker's book, by the way, is Flying Saucers and the U. S. Air Force, published by Van Nostrand, and it represents the official Air Force position on the question of whether they are real or imagined.

Well, Colonel, just what is the official Air Force position; are there actually little people from a celestial culture flying around spying on us?

COLONEL TACKER: Definitely not, Ann. The official Air Force position on flying saucers or space ships from other planets is that we do not deny the possibility that life could exist out there some place and that a visit from outer space could happen. What we say is that to date it has not happened. That is, we have no evidence on hand to prove the existence of space ships or the fact that space travel in reverse is fait accompli.

CORRICK: And yet a lot of people who are intelligent and alert people claim that they actually have seen what must be a space ship from some other planet.

COLONEL TACKER: Well, if they believe this, Ann, it's as a pure act of faith. Actually the Air Force does not deny the fact that many solid citizens have seen objects or phenomena in the sky which have mystified them for a time. In most instances when they reported these sightings to the Air Force we have been able to identify the object or the phenomena that they viewed and in most instances the reporting persons are satisfied with our interpretation.

CORRICK: Sid Davis.

DAVIS: Colonel, in your book you say "there are just not any manned space ships yet." How are you so sure?

COLONEL TACKER: Because to date, Sid, there is no evidence to substantiate such a fantastic claim.

DAVIS: Well you have a lot of reports that are unexplained and this is the way you list them in your book. What about the unexplained ones, the unknown ones?

COLONEL TACKER: Well, the unknown or unexplained cases in the last few years have run about two per cent of the total number of sightings; and in most of these instances the Air Force feels that if more immediate data had been gathered initially at the scene of the sighting, these too could have been explained.

However, we can't go along with the theory of the UFO groups and many of the persons associated with these groups that because we have not come up with a definite answer in a very few cases, that this is an argument for the existence of space ships.

CORRICK: Well Colonel Tacker, what do most of these sightings turn out to be?

COLONEL TACKER: Well, in most cases, Am, they are either conventional objects seen under extenuating circumstances like high-flying aircraft under odd lighting conditions or in unusual cloud formations, or aircraft seen through a mist or rain, or they are aerial phenomena or astrophysical phenomena such as a mock sun or a bolide, or fireball, meteor, or a planet seen by refraction due to a temperature inversion -- something along these lines.

CORRICK: What is the source of most of these reports? What kind of people call them in to you?

COLONEL TACKER: Oh, a great many people call them in. As I said before, the great majority of these people are patriotic and honest citizens who are mystified by what they see initially and they make their reports to the Air Force to try to find out, number one, I think most of them are motivated, as I said, patriotically -- try to help us. You must remember that the UFO Program, or the Flying Saucer Program, as some people prefer to call it, is a small integral part of our overall air defense mission. By law the U.S. Air Force is charged with the air defense of the United States; and when we get a report of a sighting visually, maybe at some town a few miles away from an air base or on a radar scope, and we do get returns on radar scopes now and then that look as though they are actual objects in the sky; we might scramble an aircraft. By "scramble" I mean get it off immediately, it's an aircraft that's on fighter alert and it goes up to investigate.

In all instances they come back either with a known identification of an airliner or a balloon, or they come back with a negative result, that is they found nothing. Well this is where the UFO program begins, and the technical intelligence people begin at this point and try to identify or come up with an answer for what caused the sighting; either to the observer on the

ground or what caused the return on the radar scope.

DAVIS: Colonel, what about all the charges and speculation that the Air Force has secret documents on file that are conclusions to the UFO situation and refuses to release the information?

COLONEL TACKER: This is pure rubbish, Sid. There are no such documents. I've gone through the files, I've looked thoroughly for any such an Air Force conclusion. I've never found anything to this effect and I'd like to add that the Air Force regulation on this subject, 200-2, paragraph 18 to be exact, cites specifically that UFO sightings will not be classified.

DAVIS: What other countries have frequent flying saucer reports?

COLONEL TACKER: Well, just from my experience and reading many of the reports from our own Aero-Space Technical Intelligence Center, I would say that, really, the countries that have most of the reports would be Australia, New Zealand, England and the South American or Spanish-speaking countries.

DAVIS: What about Russia?

COLONEL TACKER: That's a difficult question. We have received on occasion through our own sources over there, people stationed within Russia at various times, second-hand reports of the fact that UFO's or flying saucers have been seen there, but naturally we receive no direct result from Russian authorities on this subject.

DAVIS: Well, do Russian scientists tell you anything about their investigations of these things? Do they do anything about these reports in Russia that you know of?

COLONEL TACKER: Not that I know of, Sid; no.

CORRICK: Colonel Tacker, since the Air Force has begun investigating these sightings have these reports increased or decreased?

COLONEL TACKER: Well I'd say they've been definitely on the decrease, Ann. We had a couple of peak years, as I pointed out in the book, %fifty-two and fifty-seven. In 1952 we ^{had} quite a rash of sightings that seemed to start with the famous Washington, D. C. sightings, in 1952, and in 1957 we had a tremendous rash of sightings all over the country right after Sputnik I was launched.

CORRICK: I see. Well, how many have you had, say this year, as compared to last year?

COLONEL TACKER: Well --

CORRICK: A great decrease, a great increase?

COLONEL TACKER: I'd say a great decrease. I believe to date we've had under two hundred reports for this year.

CORRICK: Earlier you mentioned that the unexplained sightings ranged in the two per cent area...

COLONEL TACKER: Approximately two per cent for the last four or five years. Let me go out -- this is a claim, really, of some of the UFO groups in claiming that the Air Force withholds information on this subject. They say that we give an erroneous figure when we give two per cent and I have been very careful to stress that that is in the last five years. Initially in the program, I'd say that UFO unknowns ran as high as twenty per cent back in the 1940's. Again this was due to the fact that it was an entirely new area to explore, our investigative techniques weren't up to what they are now, we didn't have facilities at our disposal then like -- let me give you a real good example: the National Space Surveillance Center at Bedford, Massachusetts which can tell you on the first orbit if Russia or the United States has put something up. And certainly this unit at Bedford would be able to

tell us if space ships were in our skies.

DAVIS: Colonel, you're very positive about your feeling that if there's no evidence to substantiate these sightings, there is no such thing. This two per cent figure -- isn't it entirely possible that life on other planets has progressed beyond ours, and that perhaps they have invented a space ship that is possible of coming to planet earth and of zooming around here and then going back? Isn't this in the realm of possibility?

COLONEL TACKER: It is absolutely possible, Sid, that life exists on other planets; it's also possible that it could be of a higher order of intelligence than our own; but the last point you make about them visiting our atmosphere and zooming around and looking us over, I'd say again it's not possible up to now; that is, we have no evidence to date. And let me reiterate that that's the problem -- not if it could happen or in the future, definitely we can see that it could, that there definitely is a possibility of life out there. What we say that is up until now we have no evidence to say we have been visited from other planets.

CORRICK: Well Colonel, there have been many clubs and organizations established of people who really and honestly believe that there are these space ships zooming around, as Sid says. I'm sure you're familiar with most of them. Who are these people, who are the believers?

COLONEL TACKER: Well, Dr. Allen ^{Heinick} Heinick, our civilian consultant on this subject, and he happens to be the head of astrophysics at Northwestern University and the head of the observatory there, he calls them "cosmic romantics" and I think that's a good name. I think it's a fascinating subject myself; and as Dr. ^{Heinick} Heinick says, he'd like to see a space ship show up and be able to announce it. And there again I feel that if this did happen

the Government would announce it immediately. In fact, an event of this significance I feel positive that one agency in the Government, like the Air Force, could not repress such information. I feel that it would be in the public domain almost immediately if an event of this significance did take place.

As to the people that make up these groups, a lot of them are people like you and I that are interested in this technological age of ours. I was talking to Willy ^{Lay} Lay, the famous rocket researcher, the day before yesterday and he pointed out that we have over thirty-three pieces of hardware circling the earth right now, which is a tremendous number of artifacts to be up there whirling around. They're not all satellites; some of them are second-stage, third-stage pieces of rockets, but they're up there. And I think the public itself is getting very used to this type of thing. That's why I prophesized in the book that the flying saucer era itself is coming to an end.

CORRICK: How do you mean that?

COLONEL TACKER: Well, I believe, really, that the flying saucer era is similar to the great accent on spiritualism which took place at the turn of the century; and I believe that the public will find some other romantic subject to become imbued in and go on to it, rather than flying saucers. We're becoming used to space and it looks as though we're going to put a man into space real soon and I think this will really signify the end of the so-called saucer era.

DAVIS: Can we get back to the flying saucer clubs, et cetera? What's in it for people who become avid fans of the UFO? The people who promote the reports, the people who constantly write you letters?

COLONEL TACKER: Well, I believe, Sid, that there's a big dollar-sign involved in this subject. I think that -- well I know -- that many books and many articles are written on this subject; dues are paid to these clubs; although most of the clubs do say that they are nonprofit in nature, that they are simply dedicated to public knowledge, really, getting the information out. The groups themselves, as I said, are composed to a large extent of interested people like you and I in this scientific age that we happen to be in.

DAVIS: Some of these people, some of these so-called flying saucer buffs, or fans, or fanaticists, have tape-recordings, they have statements that they've talked to people on Venus -- Mars -- they make lectures saying that they've seen lovely women up there; what about these people? Are you going to use the term "crackpot" to describe them?

COLONEL TACKER: Oh, I think there are crackpots involved, Sid, as there are in any belief of this nature; but here's a real interesting fact about these groups. They're strongly divided between the so-called "contactees", the people that actually rush off and visit Venus and Mars at the drop of a hat, and the so-called "euphologists", the people who say that they've had no contact to date but they're sure that there are space ships from other planets looking us over. These groups even fight amongst themselves and the euphology group, the groups that investigate flying saucers, actually call the contactees crackpots. It's real interesting.

CORRICK: Colonel Tacker, just exactly what is the objective of these groups, these people? What do they want the Government to do?

COLONEL TACKER: Well, that's hard to say. They say that there's been a great deal of secrecy in Government; they absolutely overlook the need

for intelligence, intelligence classification in Government; and they feel that really we could be in great danger from space ships, maybe a greater danger than any that exists on earth.

Actually at this point I guess I should say again what I've said many times -- that there is nothing in the Air Force files, either classified or unclassified, which proves or tends to prove the existence of space ships from other planets.

CORRICK: Do you think the Air Force -- or this Government -- is now doing everything it possibly can to track down this controversy?

COLONEL TACKER: I'm absolutely positive in my own mind that our Government is doing everything it can and as an instance let me cite the vast scientific resources that the Government itself has at its disposal and by this I'm talking about the Air Research and Development Command which would include our basic research laboratories, the Air Materiel Command, scientific consultants from many different laboratories of our colleges and universities, industrial laboratories, instantaneous communications world-wide; anywhere in the world that there is a sighting, we can be talking to them in a matter of minutes.

And then compare this, really, to the really pathetic effort of a small group of euphologists who have a typewriter and read a newspaper account of the thing, and -- you see you can't really compare. It's an extreme contrast, really. And the Government does go out and investigate these things in meticulous detail; it gives its answers; and of course here's where we're questioned in our interpretation by these groups who are convinced that they're space ships. I'm sure we're not going to change the mind of a person who believes in space ships and we don't want to necessarily try. We do want to

convince them that the United States Government and the Air Force is not withholding any information on the subject.

DAVIS: Right now we're sitting in the Pentagon. Now supposing I leave here, I go outside, and I see something that looks like a cigar up in the sky. What happens? I run back inside here and I tell somebody. What do you do?

COLONEL TACKER: Well, if you came back into the Pentagon and reported it to us, I would immediately report it to the nearest air base, which is the initial course of action that any citizen should take. The air base will conduct a preliminary investigation and if in the preliminary investigation they cannot identify the object, it will be referred immediately to the Air Defense Command and the Aero Space Technical Intelligence Center, where it will be run down eventually by their investigators.

DAVIS: What prompts a scramble, then? If I'm the only person that saw this, would there be a scramble just on the basis of what I saw?

COLONEL TACKER: No; not on the basis of just one individual sighting. The air base would be alerted immediately, as I said, the nearest air base. And they in turn would immediately ascertain if many people had seen it.

DAVIS: How long does it take to run something like that down? A matter of minutes -- hours, days? Weeks?

COLONEL TACKER: Well, I'd say the initial preliminary investigation would be done very quickly; in this particular case, in this area, it would be a matter of minutes. Because we probably have many aircraft in the air over Washington both from Andrews Air Force Base and Bolling Air Force Base; possibly some of our interceptors would be up on a training mission and could be

diverted very quickly to the area; we could probably pin this down in a matter of minutes.

CORRICK: Is there any particular time of year, Colonel Tacker, when these sightings are more frequent?

COLONEL TACKER: Well, yes, Ann; in the gold spring and summertime when people are outside and are looking up. I don't imagine we had many reports on this Eastern seaboard in the last two or three days because most people have been inside next to their fires.

CORRICK: Is there any particular area of the country that you get greater numbers of reports...?

COLONEL TACKER: No, it seems to be rather evenly spread throughout the country.

CORRICK: I know we've had quite a few stories from our station in Cleveland, Ohio; and it seems to me they are seeing an awful lot of flying saucers in Cleveland.

COLONEL TACKER: I don't think Cleveland is more guilty than any of the other cities. Cleveland and Akron do have rather active UFO groups out there which are probably stressing again and again, and again, the fact that space travel in reverse is an accomplished fact. But I don't think we could take any one section or one city and pin it down and say that they reported more UFO's than anybody else.

DAVIS: What about phases of the moon? Does that have any effect on reports of UFO's?

COLONEL TACKER: Not noticeably, Sid. This has been looked into.

DAVIS: Is that right?

COLONEL TACKER: Yes, Sir.

DAVIS: You've examined the effect of --

COLONEL TACKER: Yes Sir. When I say the Aero Space Technical Intelligence Center, I'm talking about technical intelligence and technical services across the board. And this includes the psychological aspects of a thing like this.

CORRICK: Colonel Tacker, you're checked out as a pilot; you're checked out in jets;

COLONEL TACKER: I'm a master navigator.

CORRICK: Are you...

COLONEL TACKER: Yes, Ma'am.

CORRICK: At any rate you know the potential of things to come;

COLONEL TACKER: I'm qualified in current jet aircraft; multi-engine jets, yes ma'am.

CORRICK: Well do you honestly believe that we ever will put a man on the moon, a man into space?

COLONEL TACKER: I'm sure of it, Ann. I'm sure we'll put a man into space and eventually on the moon. I think it's our new frontier.

CORRICK: Someone else has picked up that phrase too, lately. Well do you believe personally that there is life on other planets? Aside from your official Air Force position?

COLONEL TACKER: I believe there's a strong possibility that there's some type of life out there, either vegetable or otherwise, Ann, and I think we'll probably discover it some day.

CORRICK: How did you get interested in this project of UFO's?

COLONEL TACKER: Well, it wasn't a matter of getting interested in it, Ann; when I was assigned in the Pentagon this was one project that was given to

me. Incidentally, there's one little phase of this where some of the UFO people say we do withhold information; they will go to an individual air base or someplace else and ask for given details on a specific case; and they're referred up to this office, where we have the big picture. We know that ATIC is working on it out in Ohio -- Aero Space Technical Intelligence people -- we know that the air base is doing something, and we know what investigative group is on it. And they're referred up here mainly because we have the big picture.

DAVIS: Colonel, you're a man that does a lot of flying, and the airlines pilots do a lot of flying, and these are competent people;

COLONEL TACKER: Absolutely!

DAVIS: --serious people; a lot of airline pilots have made statements in the past that they are convinced that they saw something that might have come from another planet, that was an object flying -- not a mirage, not a refraction of any kind, not a sky-hooked balloon. Now how do you answer these questions?

COLONEL TACKER: Well I'm convinced that they saw something, Sid; but I'm also convinced they didn't see a space ship as yet; many things enter into a pilot's way of life. Some fatigue, vertigo -- that type of thing. Many of them have seen lights which they couldn't identify for the moment, and a moment later they were identified as a light on the ground.

CORRICK: Colonel Tacker, I'm sorry to interrupt, but our time is up. Thank you for providing a Washington viewpoint about flying saucers. Our guest on Washington Viewpoint tonight has been Colonel Lawrence J. Tacker, Chief of the Magazine and Book Branch of the United States Air Force Office of Information. This program originated tonight in Colonel Tacker's office in the Pentagon. This is Ann Corrick with Sid Davis.